

Holborn & Bloomsbury Messenger

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'Our local newspaper'

500 working for arms dealer

Although the exact number of DESO's workforce is still kept secret, it can be estimated that the arms dealer is employing up to 500 employees. A whole neighbourhood is wondering how DESO has been able to hide its activities for so long.

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Government support for arms dealer

One of the most shocking facts uncovered by the *Holborn & Bloomsbury Messenger* is that the arms dealing agency receives support from the UK government. Sources say that a significant number of DESO's staff have been and still are on the Government's payroll.

Neighbour: 'outraged'

After the *Holborn & Bloomsbury Messenger* informed some individuals in the local neighbourhood about the activities of the arms dealing agency, the newspaper has been told of a wave of public disgust. Neighbour A.B., for one, has spoken of his 'outrage' at DESO's activities.

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Protest planned 16th October

The *Holborn & Bloomsbury Messenger* has learnt that a group of residents, in cooperation with a number of charities and pressure groups in the UK, are planning to protest against the activities of the arms dealing agency. The protest will be on **16 October 2006 at 12.30 pm** in front of DESO's office, **2-12 Bloomsbury Way**.

Arms dealer uncovered in Camden Borough

by Martin O'Neill

The *Holborn & Bloomsbury Messenger* has been informed by an anonymous caller about the activities of DESO (Defence Export Services Organisation). DESO is a dubious or-

London SE1. Its new offices are in St. Georges Court, 2-12 Bloomsbury Way, Holborn ward.

Camden Council has been informed by the organisation about the relocation but the agency preferred not to inform

lives, and the endless and buzzing life in the streets outside its windows is striking. DESO's main work is to create and foster deals between UK arms companies and governments all over the world. Since it was established, DESO has been involved in the selling of arms to various countries in conflict or with appalling human rights records (see box on the right for some recent customers). Currently, as documents show, the agency is trying to get into new 'key markets' such as Libya and Iraq which are described as having 'strong prospects'. Some experts even believe that the agency has tried to persuade Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett to lobby on DESO's behalf during her latest visit to Iraq in Summer 2006.

Thailand is another country which is a 'priority market' for the agency and DESO refers to it as 'one of the liveliest democracies in south-east Asia'.

There is very little information about the structure of the organisation available. However, it is thought that the organisation is headed by A.G., a former chief operating officer of another dubious organisation called MBDA, the European missile systems group. A.G. is known for his 'punchy, energetic and committed management style' in dealing arms. Also, the size of DESO's workforce can only be estimated but it is thought to employ about 500 people. There are

rumours that a significant part of this workforce are not working at DESO's headquarters but in buying countries.

What is certain is the fact that the agency is financially supported by the UK Government.

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DESO's weapons at war:

- Israel (Occupied Territories)
- US (Iraq, 2003)
- Zimbabwe (DR Congo, 1998)
- Indonesia (East Timor, 1990s)
- Iran/Iraq (1980s)
- Argentina (Falklands war, 1982)
- Chile (military coup, 1973)
- Nigeria (Biafra war, 1967)

The Boss?



This man is suspected to be the mastermind of the dubious arms dealing agency



The offices of the so called 'Defence Export Services Organisation' (DESO) on 2-12, Bloomsbury Way, London
(Photo: Toby Marhal, Reuters)

ganisation that acts as agent to sell weapons to countries like Saudi Arabia and Indonesia. It emerged that DESO moved secretly into the Bloomsbury and Holborn area about 3 years ago after having been based in St. Christopher House, Southwark Street,

the local neighbourhood about their activities. Research carried out by the *Holborn & Bloomsbury Messenger* shows that DESO's work cannot be described as anything but a 'deadly business'. The contrast between its work, dedicated to ending people's

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How the agency has been hiding its activities for 40 years...

How DESO works - the secret activities of Bloomsbury's arms dealer

DESO, the Defence Export Services Organisation, based in the borough of Camden, is a government agency that employs nearly 500 civil servants in the Ministry of Defence (MoD). These civil servants are placed entirely at the service of arms companies. They

- identify potential opportunities for arms sales
- push for deals
- brief government ministers to lobby on behalf of the arms industry when visiting countries abroad
- help the arms companies to conclude deals
- help companies to get export licences

They are headed by a seconded

arms industry executive, presently Alan Garwood, who has a formal role of advising government ministers on arms exports. This access goes right to the top: Charles Masefield's (Head of DESO from 1994-98) biography plainly stated that he enjoyed "direct access to Major and Blair." There is no ambiguity as to the nature of the post of Head of DESO. While the Heads receive a civil service salary, it is 'topped-up' by the arms industry. DESO provides pure insider influence for arms companies. Many industries have trade associations, such as the arms industry's Defence Manufacturers Association and the Society of British

Aerospace Companies, and these are readily understandable private groupings that represent companies. Even though they are often influential, they are separate from government. DESO is different. It merges the major arms companies and UK government in a formal, institutionalised and profoundly undemocratic relationship. The result is of an entirely different level and nature to that of normal lobbying or political persuasion. DESO boasts that it is responsible for more than 75% of UK arms exports.

by Tony Brown

Why DESO should be shut for good

DESO was set up in 1966 to promote arms exports at a time when the UK arms industry was owned by the government, was focused on providing equipment for the UK armed forces and when most of the deals involved selling-on ex-army equipment. Each of these situations has changed radically:

- The UK arms industry is now privately-owned;
- The arms business is now international, not national.

There can be no justification for UK tax-payer support for international arms businesses;

- Deals revolve around new arms, not surplus UK military equipment.

Despite the very different circumstances that pertain today, 40 years on, DESO still exists. There have always been strong ethical reasons for shutting DESO, but now it is difficult to see ANY public interest in retaining it. DESO remains open not because of the national interest, but as a result of inertia and arms company influence. It should have no place within government. It is tragic enough that arms companies are allowed to sell their weaponry around the world, but it is astonishing that a democratically-elected government provides financial and political support to help them do it. At a time when civil servant posts are being cut across government, there remains a unit that is dedicated to selling weapons purely in pursuit of shareholder profit. DESO should be closed down.

by Des Blair

The campaign to shut DESO

by John O'Groat

2006 marks DESO's 40th anniversary. More than 30 organisations think that 40 years of government gunrunning is enough and are currently campaigning for the closure of DESO. This coalition includes Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT), the Fellowship of

Almost 400 MPs all over the UK have been contacted by their constituents and encouraged to call for DESO's closure. Many organisations and individuals have also signed a corresponding petition. Based on that statement, an Early Day Motion (EDM), a sort of parliamentary petition, has been tabled by Lib Dem MP

dia is becoming increasingly aware of DESO's existence, too. Is 'promoting peace for wimps whereas real governments sell weapons?' asked George Monbiot in a recent article in *The Guardian*, referring to the government's support of DESO. Raising public awareness about DESO through such articles and nonviolent actions is one of the principal aims of the campaign to shut DESO. Symon Hill, spokesperson for CAAT, one of the leading organisations of the campaign, explains: "More and more people are becoming aware of DESO's work. As public pressure grows, the Government will be forced to question its support for DESO. Everyone who hears about DESO can make a difference by adding his or her voice to the call for DESO's closure." In order to increase the pressure on the government, the organisations are calling on their supporters to contact their MPs and to discuss DESO in arranged meetings.

One of the crucial days in the campaign is the **Shut DESO Action Day on Monday 16 October 2006**. By building a human chain around DESO's headquarter in 2-12 Bloomsbury Way, the organisations, with the support of local residents, will send out a clear message that time is up for the government's gunrunners. People who want to join the human chain are asked to register for the event at www.caat.org.uk or by contacting CAAT's office on 020 7281 0297. The organisations see their efforts as part of a broader campaign to highlight the influ-

ence of private arms companies within the British government. CAAT's 'Call the Shots' campaign is, for example, also highlighting the 'revolving door' (the transfer of high ranked civil servants in the MoD to arms companies via secondment) between arms companies and government. CAAT has also revealed the continuously growing network of advisory bodies and lobbying companies under the Labour government, raising urgent questions about transparency, accountability and favourable access to ministers. Additionally, CAAT is criticising the fact that a number of Labour Peers have links to arms-producing companies and has revealed that the arms industry has contributed largely undisclosed amounts of cash to the Labour Party.

All these facts have raised the question of whether the government's support of the arms industry is compatible with New Labour's statements about achieving a better world. As Chris Cole, director of FoR, adds: "It simply makes no

sense to call for a better and more democratic world whilst at the same time supporting arms companies' efforts to sell British weapons all over the world."



It is behind these windows in the DESO headquarter in Holborn ward that the secret activities of the arms dealing agency take place. (Photo: Toby Marhal, Reuters)

Reconciliation (FoR), SPEAK, CND, the Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru and the Green Party. The campaign has already gained widespread support:

Charles Kennedy to discuss the activities of DESO in Parliament. Although the agency has succeeded to a surprising degree in hiding its activities, the me-

What neighbours think about DESO

"I've lived in Bloomsbury for 30 years, and I'm shocked to discover that the block next to mine now houses hundreds of civil servants trying to spread as many weapons around the world as possible. The name Bloomsbury has historical connotations of enlightenment and academia. But now, whenever I hear news of people in some conflict zone being slaughtered, I'll know that it's my neighbours who are trying to ensure that British companies make the most profit from the misery and destruction. Ironically, the building is within sight of London's blue plaque commemorating the famous peace campaigner Bertrand Russell."
(Albert Beale, concerned local resident)

Advertisement

Shut DESO

Time's up for the government's gunrunners

Please send me a free information pack about CAAT's Shut DESO campaign.

I enclose a donation of £ _____
(please make cheques payable to CAAT)

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Please return to CAAT, FREEPOST LON 6486, London N4 3BR.
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