

"FORTRESS EUROPE?" - Circular Letter

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ELECTRO-SHOCK WEAPONS: THE "TORTURE TRAIL"

The use of electro-shock weapons in torture, rape and a catalogue of other abuses has been widely reported. Amnesty International and the British Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture regard the shock baton as the torturers' universal tool. Nevertheless, British companies are illegally producing and selling electronic shields and batons to countries notorious for their human rights records, such as Turkey and China, a TV programme broadcast on the *Dispatches* series of *Channel 4* (11 January 1995) reveals.

According to a survey by the British Forensic Science Service commissioned by the Home Office (British Interior Ministry), the effects of modern pulsed variants of electro-shock weapons on the human body are more severe by nearly two orders of magnitude than the old fashioned cattle shock prods. They cause temporary incapacitation of the whole body for at least five minutes. However, physical evidence of their use is difficult to detect.

A year ago, the British Trade Minister unequivocally agreed that "any export of equipment which can be used for torture is quite unacceptable . . . We have to ensure that this trade is stopped and whenever it comes to our notice, we do of course insist that it is stopped". British legislation imposes sharp restrictions both on production, possession and sales of electronic weapons. Export without a licence is prohibited.

Secret 'Covert Operation' exhibition

Set against this background, the ease with which an undercover team investigating for *Dispatches* managed not only to enter the heart of British defence Industry and to obtain access to a secret network of electro-shock weapons manufacturers and suppliers, but also to come away with over £4 million of orders, is extraordinary indeed.

The orders reported in the programme (10,000 electro-shock shields and 5000 shock batons from British Aerospace, and 15,000 electro-shock units from IFECLTechnical Plastics), are prodigious quantities to let go - particularly to the Lebanon.

But perhaps the insight the programme gave into the procurement and proliferation of the electro-control technology, is even more astonishing. Philip Morris, the Sales manager for Royal Ordnance, agreed to use the company's world-wide procurement network to bring the electro-shock deal together, irrespective of the equipment's country of origin or to its eventual destination.

British Aerospace, Royal Ordnance's parent company, invited their clients to meet up at the secret Covert

Operation and Procurement Exhibition (COPEX), held at Sandtown Race Track, 1-3 November 1994. A wide range of internal security equipment was on display, the entire complex being guarded by special forces. Foreign invitees included delegations from China, Algeria, Bosnia, Columbia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka and Turkey.

8000 German shock batons to Saudi Arabia

The *Dispatches* team followed through the rendezvous with a meeting at Royal Ordnance's own offices in Chorley (Lancashire). The team was shown a 40,000 volt shock baton made in Ireland, a riot shield made by Nova Technologies (USA) which could immobilise 250 people without a battery charge. In presence of the team, Sales Manager Morris confirmed that Royal Ordnance had sold 8000 German shock batons to Saudi Arabia. The *Dispatches* programme concluded that given the £500,000 cost of the deal was paid for in oil, British Aerospace would have had to invoice the Ministry of Defence for payment and thus the British government must have known what was going on.

IFECLTechnical Plastics: Hong Kong connection

The *Dispatches* team also interviewed Frank Stott, the boss of IFECLTechnical Plastics in Glasgow and a founding member of the Association of Police and Public Security Suppliers. Stott said the Scottish Office had granted him permission to manufacture electro-shock devices, but the Glasgow Police had asked him to keep very quiet about his involvement in the trade. On the programme, he claimed that he used to sell shock batons to the Apartheid regime in South Africa; to Abu Dhabi for the Gulf States. A year after the Tiananmen Square massacre, he sold electro-shock weapons to China, via Hong Kong, with the Government's blessing and the support of the British Department of Trade and Industry [DTI: The body charged with overseeing the control of the export of weapons and other controlled goods and services].

Mr. Stott claimed that the Chinese wanted the weapons to copy. Such vertical proliferation is a fearful consequence since Chinese workshops are already producing 80,000 shock weapons a year and their use, according to Amnesty, has become endemic in this country.

Electric shields no weapon, Home Office says

In the *Dispatches* programme, the Home Office (British Interior Ministry) denied that any police force in the UK possessed or planned to possess shock-weapons. Yet, on 19 January, the same Home Office admitted that electronic shields had been bought by senior officers in several of Great Britain's police forces. The Home Office denied that this amounted to any inconsistency with its earlier statements in the programme, as the electronic shield was "not a weapon - it is a defensive instrument". [This is an interesting interpretation. In Germany, the carrying of helmets by demonstrators is prohibited on the grounds that helmets are "passive weapons"].

The British government has since confirmed that no authority had been granted neither to IFECL Nor to British Aerospace to manufacture, possess or sell electro-shock weapons. According to a Government spokesman, "no company has been granted authority specifically to possess electric shock weapons in the last two years". Therefore, given the evidence presented in the *Dispatches* programme, British Aerospace salesman Philip Morris and Icl's Frank Stott will face five years in jail, if the government wishes to be seen as taking the control of trade seriously.

European Parliament: governments breach their own export bans

In Britain, the Labour opposition has called for a full investigation in the "electronic control" trade.

On 19 January, the European Parliament also backed Amnesty's call for an investigation and called upon the Commission to "bring forward new proposals to incorporate these technologies within the scope of arms export controls and ensure greater transparency in the export of all military, security and police technologies to prevent the hypocrisy of governments who themselves breach their own export bans".

Indeed there is urgent need for action - not only in the UK. European companies known to have been involved in the manufacture or supply of electro-shock weapons include Browning (Belgium); Equipol, France-Selection, Neral & Cie SARL (France); Bonowi, ERO, Micro and Security International; Romer, Sicherheitstechnik Schmid, and Solid Company (Germany).

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