

## Notes on Politics and Power

### Unrestrained sales at Aldershot

*Duncan Campbell writes:* The British Army has just started its biennial two week festival. The opening shots were fired at Army Equipment Exhibition 1978, which opened on Monday at Aldershot. The exhibition is morbidly bizarre; one of the odder features is that, perhaps unlike every other military lobby, those participating have no clear rationale about what they are doing – or why.

The international sale of armaments from Britain – much of it nationalised and the rest under an acceptable ministerial umbrella – now goes by the popular euphemism of 'defence sales'. A 400-strong department organises such festivities as BAEE78. Their front man during Monday's press conference was Major-General Beech, Master General of the Ordnance. He fell to the first googly at the press conference, when supporters of the Campaign against the Arms Trade made the obvious comments on the unpleasant and awkward juxtaposition of the United Nations Special Session on Disarmament and the Army Exhibition.

The General did not seem to have any great faith in the immense good of defence sales. 'We're all children of our time. We should be seen in the light of that by our successors.' The contradictions were problems for the government and not for him. Save for alleged savings in a few items in the UK defence budget, he had little to proffer in defence of himself and his colleagues.

Prime Minister Callaghan, on a recent visit to UNSSD, has urged 'restraint'. The Defence Sales Organisation is anything but restrained. In terms of visiting generals and suchlike, the show is larger than ever. The official list of visitors is confidential, but details are circulated to exhibitors. The list of visiting officials from overseas is vastly longer than for the previous (and first) Army show in 1976. Some 900 places are allocated to almost 90 countries – a dramatic increase.

South Africa and its satellites, Chile, the Warsaw Pact and friends like Angola, Mozambique and Afghanistan are obviously banned. But many other nasty South Americans who did not appear in 1976 are here now – although it is impossible to discover whether by accident or design.

From perusal of the rest of the list, covering almost every third and fourth rate power around the globe, it seems that British restraint in arms selling amounts to dragging virtually every defence attaché in London to the show if no-one else is willing or able to come. What exactly is the Sultan of Oman's Director of Royal Music Band, or the Bahamas High Commissioner seeking to find? Not to mention twelve officers from Qatar who must represent a sizeable proportion of the emirate's officer corps.

### Lords caught in price ring

*Patrick Wintour writes:* The chairman of the Conservative Party, Lord Thorneycroft has just had a fortunate escape. Last Thursday Jeff Rooker, the Labour backbencher, tried to raise in the Commons Thorneycroft's involvement, since 1969, as chairman of Pirelli General, in an unlawful price fixing ring operating against the Post Office. The four companies concerned, who had been operating the ring between 1965 and 1974 had, at the beginning of the week,

*Their Lords (clockwise from top left) Thorneycroft, Watkinson, Caccia and Aldington.*



agreed to pay back £9m. of the public's money. Over those nine years the Post Office, unaware of the cartel's existence, has spent £500m. on cables. Rooker went to great lengths with the clerks to phrase an early day motion that allowed him under parliamentary rules to 'reflect on the character of a member of another place.' However, the Speaker, George Thomas ruled Rooker out of order, thus seeming to protect company chairmen inside the House, while leaving their counterparts outside as fair game. A pertinent point, in that the other leading figures in the ring were also Lords – something that Jeff Rooker did not know.

The dominant company in the ring was British Insulated Callender's Cables, whose vice chairman was at one time Lord Watkinson, last year's President of the CBI and a former Tory Cabinet Minister. He was a director of BICC between 1968 and 1977. The other two companies concerned were Telephone Cables, a subsidiary of GEC whose vice-chairman is Lord Aldington, a former vice chairman of the Conservative Party and also Standard Telephone and Cables, a subsidiary of ITT whose chairman since 1968 has been Lord Caccia, a former Head of the Diplomatic Service. In other words, some of Britain's leading advocates of the market mechanism.

The ring which has been in existence since 1965 emerged a few months after the start of a Monopolies Commission inquiry into insulated electric wires and cables. Not the first operated against the Post Office, the ring involved collusion on pricing and co-operation between companies in the ordering of the

submission of tenders to the Post Office. The Restrictive Practices Court ruled against the ring in November 1975. The chairman of the Post Office at the time, Sir William Ryland, then had to battle with the four companies to let accountants look at their books, the only means whereby the Post Office could win fair compensation out of court.

Lord Thorneycroft said of the cartel last week that it might have been devised to secure stability and employment in the industry. The explanation tallies poorly with his resignation as Chancellor in 1958 over high levels of public expenditure, and even less well with his remarks in the House of Lords in 1974, when he said that it was 'certain that the ruthless exploitation of monopoly in industrial action could bring even the greatest nation to its knees.'

Still less, perhaps, with his articles in the *News of the World* this April, saying that Britain's problem is that 'we are showing ourselves to be quite incapable of facing competition . . . the real attack on authority in Britain is that it has ignored the collapse of management control in public and private enterprise alike, and ceased to interest itself in rewards for greater effort.'

### Zimbabwean students: refugees or UK citizens?

*Anna Coote writes:* On Monday 21-year-old Zimbabwean Israel Chabikwe learnt that he would not, after all, be deported for outstaying the time limit attached to his passport. Mr Justice Rubin of the Inner London Crown Court took the view that since Chabikwe was a member of ZANU, the banned party of Robert Mugabe, his life would be in danger if he returned to Rhodesia – 'hardship . . . out of all proportion to the gravity of the offence he has committed'. It was good news for other supporters of ZANU and ZAPU. It also raised an intriguing question about the constitutional position of all Zimbabweans in Britain.

When Ian Smith announced UDI, the British government dissolved the Rhodesian parliament and declared direct rule. Rhodesians thus became British citizens. But since the Labour government did not wish to play host to supporters of the rebel regime, George Thomson, the minister responsible, made a statement in the House of Commons on 17th June 1968, to the effect that Rhodesians who were friendly to Smith would not be welcomed in Britain.

In 1975 the National Union of Zimbabwean Students worked out a deal with the UK government whereby approximately 1,800 black students were allowed to come to Britain to pursue their studies. Israel Chabikwe was one of them. Most arrived with Rhodesian passports, which are not recognised by the UK. Although they were technically British citizens, they were not given regular British passports. Some got small slips of paper attached to their illegal passports, stating how long they were allowed to stay (usually a renewable term of three to 12 months). Others were given British passports with a special stamp inside which said that in accordance with the House of Commons statement of June 17 1968, they were subject to the UK Immigration Rules.

It is highly unlikely, of course, that many of the students admitted to Britain in 1975 were friendly to the Smith regime. Chabikwe, for one, had been arrested by Smith's police and interrogated for three days about his allegiance to ZANU. Since George Thomson's statement referred specifically to pro-Smith

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