

A spirit of enterprise at the Ministry of Defence

Duncan Campbell and Robin Cook write: The endeavours of British arms salesmen were acclaimed at this week's Aldershot Army Exhibition by Sir Ronald Ellis, head of the Defence Sales Organisation, with the comment that 96 per cent of his merchandise had 'never been used in anger'. The basis of this quantification — or a list of victims of the remaining 4 per cent of sales, likely to be worth £50 million in exports — was not explained.

Although this year's weapons sales are estimated to be worth over £1200 million, with an increasing emphasis on repressive 'internal security' material, there is some evidence that gaudy weapons displays like BAEE 1980 are a costly flop. The *New Statesman* has obtained a copy of the confidential list of foreign visitors to this year's show. Comparison with similar lists from 1976 and 1978 shows that the Ministry of Defence salesmen have had to reach new heights (or depths).

Although Sir Ronald Ellis claimed that 89 countries would visit the show, only 41 had actually accepted on the last list sent to exhibitors. Some, including Saudi Arabia, refused to attend at all. Dozens of nations refused to send delegates unless the MoD coughed up their air fare and full expenses (West End hotels included). Such free-loaders included Indonesia, Tunisia, Morocco, Mexico, Philippines, Bolivia, Ghana, Guyana, Zaire, Columbia, Turkey and many more. They can hardly be expected to be good paying customers. According to Hugh Braden, the Assistant Under Secretary of State for Defence Sales, the MoD has paid up each time.

Almost all the big delegations came from NATO or other European countries; it is clear that third world attendance (for whom BAEE is primarily intended) has dramatically slumped. This should at least be a heartening sign for Amnesty International who recently published a study of the transfer of repressive technology from Britain. Security forces accused of torture have increasingly been found to be British equipped. The moment of truth came close when, after the fall of Amin, it emerged that his State Research Centre death camp had been liberally equipped by British companies — Pye being particularly prominent. The arms traders continued to lavish their attention on Amin, even after one of their number was clubbed to death by his Ugandan clients.

Twenty seven of the countries attending the Aldershot show feature strongly in Amnesty's lists. A detailed examination of the delegates confirms that there is an increasing interest in surveillance and security equipment, as against conventional military armaments. What, for example, may the Director of Electronics of Malaysian Military Intelligence be looking for? One of the week's well known visitors is also better known away from the conventional battle field: Ulrich Wegener, formerly head of the SAS type GSG9 unit. Wegener was accompanied by GSG9's equipment officer and the head of the German Police Academy Research Dept.

Britain's policy on arms sales, according to the Defence White Paper, is 'a policy of responsible restraint' in which consideration of human rights is given 'full weight'. The truth is that no export licence is required for the supply of any equipment with a civilian as well as a military application, which conveniently excludes from control most of the communications and computer technology which police states wish to acquire. Mrs Thatcher has rejected a demand from Amnesty to bring repressive equipment under export control, complaining that the necessary legislation would be 'adding greatly to the burden of government (in terms of manpower and money) and of British exporters at a time when our export industry already faces serious difficulties'.

The Ministry of Defence also now apparently feels free to publicise its new 'wholly owned commercial subsidiary', International Military Sales Ltd (IMS).

This unique example of free enterprise by a Ministry has had little publicity until now; IMS only came to public attention when three of its personnel were apprehended last year before the Ayatollah's revolutionary courts.

Under Secretary Braden claimed that IMS had not ever been an official secret, despite the fact that any details of its £250 million a year operations are omitted from the Defence White Paper. A suitable question about its formation was planted in parliament in 1977, he acknowledged, when the Defence Sales Organisation decided to take it over from the Crown Agents — where it was previously known euphemistically as Millbank Technical Services (almost all its business was military).

Despite all this public funding of extraordinary enterprise, there is little evidence that the weapons trade is actually boosting exports, for those who see this as desirable. At Monday's press conference, DSO head Sir Ronald Ellis conceded that this year's expectation of £1200 million sales represented, in real terms, virtually nil growth over five years. Need they bother at all?

The Sombrero plotters

Ken Fuller writes: The military coup almost made its first appearance in the English-speaking Caribbean with last weekend's unsuccessful coup attempt against Michael Manley's left-wing government in Jamaica. Violence has been increasing ever since Manley announced on February 3 that there would be elections this year: Manley's People's National Party appears to have seen victory slipping from its grasp. A military coup could be justified as restoring 'law and order'.

No names have yet been given publicly for the Jamaica Defence Force men arrested, but one reliable source says that the highest-ranking officer involved was a Captain James. Also arrested were two lieutenants (one, named Argill, a commander of the B150 tank squad), ten corporals and five privates. The only civilian arrested was Charles Johnson, leader of the small, right-wing Jamaica United Front Party.

According to plan, the plotters were to have left their assembly points at the Sombrero Club and the Turntable Club at 3am on Sunday. First Robert Neish, the JDF Chief of Staff, a firm constitutionalist, was to have been killed. Then, a quick dash to Jamaica House, where Manley was to have been seized, taken to the radio station, and forced to broadcast his resignation.

Although the right-wing Jamaica Labour Party has strenuously denied any involvement (its leader, Edward Seaga, is reported to have been out of the country), the *Jamaica Daily News* reported on Monday that the plotters' next intended step was a hand-over to Seaga.

No firm evidence has yet emerged to support allegations of American involvement, although the US military attache, a Col. Lindren, has been a frequent visitor to 'certain elements' at the JDF camp. And the possibility of American complicity is given some weight by the fact that former UN Ambassador Andrew Young, together with Congressman John Dixon, has alleged that the National Security Council has undertaken 'destabilisation' plans aimed at Manley's regime.

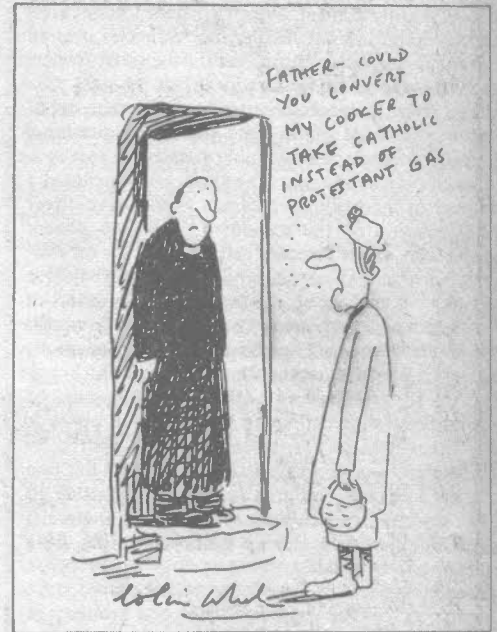
An Irish swap?

John O'Callaghan writes: Britain plans to shut down Northern Ireland's ramshackle gas industry, at a cost of £78 million. Meanwhile off the south coast of the Republic the Kinsale natural gas find is better than expected. Anxious to avoid extinction, the North's gas makers have now opened secret negotiations with the Republic's gas board for a supply from Kinsale. The pipeline would qualify for an EEC grant of up to 49 per cent of cost.

Southern gas would be paid for partly by electricity from the North. On present form, by the mid-1980s Northern Ireland will be burdened with twice

as much electricity generating capacity as it actually needs, thanks to bad planning in the past. A reopened electrical interconnector with the South would reduce the cost, and embarrassment, of the Northern Ireland Electricity Service; it would also end the Republic's need to think about a nuclear power station.

It is widely believed that Ireland's natural gas field will yield more than the claimed 125m. cu.ft. a day over 20 years. On present use the whole of Northern Ireland would take about 20 million a day; Dublin needs about 10 million and Cork five. Connections to the bulk of the rest of Ireland's urban population could result in a national demand for 50 million cubic feet daily. (The Dublin Gas Company is urging the government to create a national gas grid.) This would still leave plenty for Nitrogen Eireann, the Irish fertiliser plant, which now uses 52 million cubic feet a day.



BP brings the coal in

Pete James writes: BP's bid for the mining finance house Selection Trust — the biggest takeover in British history — highlights the major diversification the oil multinationals are undertaking into natural resources, and in particular coal. These moves — given a particular significance by the Vienna summit's resolution to cut oil consumption — are inspired by the forecasts of a possible trebling in world production of coal-derived products by the end of the century.

The move into coal has been most marked in America, helped by the low stock market value of mining companies, which have thus been easy takeover prey, and the cheap long leases granted on government coal reserves. Oil companies today account for a quarter of US coal output and control up to half the national reserves. By the mid-eighties they are expected to be producing half of America's coal. In addition the oil companies dominate research and development into coal conversion technologies.

BP and Shell have been in the forefront of the moves to extend the oil companies' interests in coal outside America. Shell plan to invest between £100 and £200 million to secure 15 per cent of the world trade in coal by the 1990s. They have recently paid over £300 million for a half share in A T Massey, America's tenth largest domestic coal producer. In addition to other interests in America, Shell has coal investments in southern Africa, Canada, Australia, Belgium and Holland. If some of the more optimistic targets are correct, Shell may control coal production equal to half the UK's present output.

Already British Steel and the CEBG have taken advantage of the cheap coal on long term contracts