

Merry-go-round of death

Cynthia Cockburn

Every two years, the UK plays host to an international 'arms trade fair', the Defence Systems Equipment International (DSEi). In September 2003, arms buyers from all over the world were invited to London's Excel Centre to shop for guns and tanks, military aircraft and artillery, mines and small arms. The government spent £420 million of taxpayers' money in twelve months on supporting the sale of arms, and subsidised DSEi by £1.5 million.

In the photos here and on the front cover, Women in Black against War portray this so-called 'fair' as a sinister merry-go-round. 'Roll up, roll up! Buy your candy floss and take your pick of all the most up to date methods of killing and controlling people'. WIB's leaflet protested that - putting British companies' profitability above morality and responsibility - the government permits arms sales to regimes with appalling human rights records, countries that are at war with each other, and to the world's poorest regions, where public spending should be on education, health, food and housing. The street drama focused attention particularly on small arms, 10 per cent of the 'legal' global arms trade. Handguns sell like hot cakes at the DSEi fair and are often implicated in violence against women.

Women in Black called on the UK government to stop licensing arms exports, convert the weapons industry to socially-responsible production, support multilateral disarmament and ban the sale of hand guns.

Women in Black against War is an international network. Further information from <wibinfo@gn.apc.org> and <www.womeninblack.org.uk>.

Photography: Cynthia Cockburn



From a 9-panel exhibition 'Lying, Sitting, Standing, Stepping: Some Women's Actions for Peace and Justice 1995-2003', available for loan. Enquiries <wibinfo@gn.apc.org>.





As we lay on the cobbles of Covent Garden, it began to rain.