

Talking peace; selling war

reprinted from: *The CUSO Journal*, June 1984

In Ottawa, in March two conferences were being held simultaneously. One was talking war. The other was talking peace.

The timing was not coincidental.

For several years, there have been resolutions passed at the annual meeting of the Canadian Council for International Cooperation (the umbrella organization for some 95 Canadian organizations involved in international development) calling for action on the issue of disarmament. Finding a means for dealing with these resolutions proved difficult, but this year the CCIC Board of Directors hit on a solution: they decided to hold a conference on the development and disarmament to coincide with the 21st High Technology Industries' Export Conference held in Ottawa by the Defence Programs Branch of the federal department of External Affairs. The annual Hi-Tech Conference helps promote the sale of military-related equipment, and is intended primarily to expose Canada's trade commissioners from around the world to a wide range of

military products available for export by Canadian corporations. The 400 people attending this year included many of the country's top hi-tech executives whose companies supply components for weapons' systems, along with 65 Canadian trade commissioners from postings around the world. Dark suits and briefcases were the order of the day.

The two conferences took place within blocks of each other. While those at the Hi-Tech Conference were talking war, 120 people from across Canada, many of them representing international development organizations, were at the Disarmament and Development meeting listening to internationally known speakers like Commonwealth Secretary-General Shridath Ramphal and Swedish disarmament champion Inga Thorsson. The theme was the immorality of the arms race.

"The purpose of the conference was to point to the fact that the federal government was promoting trade of military-related products and to assist CCIC member-organizations in understanding the link between development and disarmament", says Ken Shipley, a member of the CCIC Board

of Directors and also one of CUSO's four representatives at the conference.

The conference was also designed to give an indication to the government that public opinion is changing with respect to the arms race. "The speakers at the conference presented strong arguments that the arms build-up is ill-advised, counter-productive and is courting disaster", Ken points out. "The CCIC conference drew attention to the contradiction of the government talking peace on one hand while promoting the sale of war on the other. Decisions about the allocation of public funds, including military expenditures, are made by politicians. Politicians, practising the art of the possible, tend to note which way the group is going and then rush to the front and yell: 'Follow me, your leader'."

In addition to sponsoring four delegates to the conference, CUSO also provided some funding to help with organization. Why was CUSO so concerned about disarmament?

As Ken points out, it is projected that total global international development assistance over the next five years will equal world

military expenditures over the next four days.

"Clearly, things are badly out of whack," he says. "CUSO is now 22 years old. We have done good development work over the years and have grown and improved as a development agency. Yet, the disturbing thing is that most of our host countries are worse off today than they were in 1961, both relatively and, in most cases absolutely. Something is wrong, and more and more leading thinkers are laying at least some of the blame at the feet of the military-industrial complex.

"Money and resources devoted to militarization are not available for civilian purposes. Military expenditures generally do not contribute to the productive capacity of the domestic economy. This is particularly critical when Third World countries feel compelled to spend increasing amounts on military goods, but the view is also becoming more prevalent that military spending has contributed to the present world economic crisis."

As a result of the conference, CCIC is investigating various follow-up actions intended to promote more public awareness of the issue and

improve the links both nationally and internationally between development and peace-oriented groups. One idea is a national conference to build a coalition

of development, labor and peace groups; another is a Middle Powers conference of non-government organizations. Both ideas are in the early stages of discussion.

A more concrete idea that was explored in conjunction with Project Ploughshares was a 1984 Elections' Campaign: group action to ensure that every federal candidate was asked for his/her views on disarmament and the question would be raised at every public election meeting.

Meanwhile, Ken is urging those involved with CUSO and all supporters of international development to write to Prime Minister Mulroney and their Member of Parlia-

ment to protest Cruise Missile Testing in Canada and outline their support for disarmament. CUSO has also put together an information package for cooperants overseas.

PROJECT PLOUGHSHARES

...Swords into Ploughshares...



"and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares"

The Fredericton group meets the 2nd Thursday of each month at

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The St. John group holds business meetings every second Thursday at 7 p.m. at Centenary Queen Square United Church. Education meetings are held the fourth Thursday of every month at 7 p.m. at Portland United Church.

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...the accumulation of weapons, particularly nuclear weapons, today constitutes much more threat than a protection for the future of mankind... the time has come... to seek security in disarmament.

Final Report of the 1978 United Nations Special Session