

# THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST HECKLER & KOCH IN THE UK

*transcript of speech delivered by Shut Down H&K at*

## 60 JAHRE HECKLER & KOCH: KEIN GRUND ZUM FEIERN

(60 YEARS OF HECKLER & KOCH: NO CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION)

*Friday March 6<sup>th</sup> 2009, 20:00*

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Hello, greetings from Great Britain. First of all I would like to thank RIB and ORL and DFG-VK; all the peace groups who have invited us and whose financial help has made it possible for us to be here today. We've travelled from Nottingham, a small city in the middle of England, and I want to tell you about our campaign against Heckler & Koch, but first, a bit of history.

The Royal Ordnance Factory in Nottingham produced artillery guns and shells for World Wars I and II. In 1969 Heckler & Koch made one of its infamous licensed production deals with Royal Ordnance in the UK so that where Heckler & Koch was restricted by the German Federal Government from exporting, the Royal Ordnance could make the weapons under license and ship them, thereby getting around German export restrictions. Hundreds of thousands of these weapons were supplied to countries that the German government did not allow Heckler & Koch to deal with such as in the 70s Nigeria and Kenya, and in the 80s Sudan.

In 1987, the privatised Royal Ordnance was sold to Britain's largest arms company, British Aerospace, and a new Small Arms Facility was built in Nottingham. One of its first jobs was to make MP5 submachine guns that later turned up in the Bosnian war. In 1991 British Aerospace acquired Heckler & Koch, which then took over the Nottingham Small Arms Facility and continued using it to evade German export restrictions, producing weapons that were used in human rights violations in Ecuador and Indonesia.

Between 1998 and 2000, Turkey was licensed to produce 600 000 Heckler & Koch assault rifles, despite the country's well-known military oppression of its Kurdish minority. So in May 2000, eleven people staged the first demonstration against Heckler & Koch in Great Britain, leafleting workers at the Royal Ordnance Factory in Nottingham.

In 2002, British Aerospace, now called BAE Systems, sold Heckler & Koch to private investors. The Royal Ordnance Factory in Nottingham was closed down, but Heckler & Koch stayed in Nottingham. They tried to keep their new location secret, but it was rediscovered by anti-arms-trade activists in 2007.

A little investigation revealed that an unsignposted warehouse near to the University Hospital was being used as an international sales office and distribution depot. No signs, no address publicly available. We weren't sure that it was them. So we decided to go and pay them a visit.

From the outset it was clear that the police were very protective of Heckler & Koch. Five minutes after I buzzed on the intercom and asked "Is that Heckler & Koch?" three police cars arrived, I was surrounded by officers, some of them armed, and when I refused to tell them what I was doing

there, they threatened to arrest me under the Terrorism Act. That was when we knew we had found Heckler & Koch.

We decided to get some people together, and using our local social centre as a base, we organised a demonstration. So the next time we went back to Heckler & Koch, we went back with 40 people with banners and placards and megaphones and flyers, and we were met at the gates of Heckler & Koch by the same number of police, some mounted on horseback. The company closed down for the afternoon.

Nottingham has had problems with gun crime and a lot of Nottingham people we believe would be outraged to learn of the presence of Heckler & Koch in the city. But nobody knows about it – it's a secret. So with this in mind we sent out press releases. Local newspapers, radio and TV were interested, interviews were arranged, photographers were booked. And then before publication, media outlets suddenly started to drop the story.

It was the same when we organised a large demonstration the following year. We turned up with 70 people; once again we tried to get media coverage. And this we found out is what was happening behind the scenes: When reporters from the newspapers or TV or radio phoned up Heckler & Koch to ask for a statement or comment on what they thought about the demonstration, the man on the phone said "We will tell you nothing, and we advise you to talk to your editor before you run this story."

Then within ten minutes, the media outlets received phone calls from Nottinghamshire police, warning them that it would be "irresponsible" for them to reveal the location of Heckler & Koch in Nottingham. But they failed to stop all the coverage, and we were reported in local newspaper, radio and TV and through the independent media network Indymedia.

And we're not going away. Since May 2008 we've had monthly pickets outside Heckler & Koch. We've investigated trying to get the company evicted, and we're now going to be also campaigning against the landlord of Heckler & Koch. We distributed thousands of leaflets to the people of Nottingham, who are always shocked to learn of the arms company's presence, and we are challenging the police censorship of the media.

Some people ask us what's the point of this campaign? The company Heckler & Koch is too big and powerful, and if you shut down this factory, they will just open another one somewhere else, maybe somewhere else in Britain, somewhere else in another country.

My answer is this: Just by pursuing our campaign, we are raising public awareness, about Heckler & Koch and about the small arms industry in general. This bad publicity could lead to reduced investment and loss of profit, as it has done with other arms companies that have been targeted by similar campaigns in the UK. Public scrutiny could lead to tighter regulation of arms exports.

And closing the Nottingham office would be a serious blow to Heckler & Koch, disrupting their operations, costing them dearly and rallying anti-arms-trade campaigners elsewhere. If the company opens a new facility elsewhere then it must be opposed there too, and that is the key. The arms industry is global and so opposition to the arms industry needs to be global as well. And that is why we've travelled from Nottingham to be here this weekend. Thank you.