

Forum voor Vredesactie Flemish peace campaign 1998

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Impressions of a Flemish peace campaign

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The AFCEA arms fair

The last seven years the Forum voor Vredesactie had campaigned against a high-technological arms fair in Brussels.

What did we do ?

- direct actions, blockades of the entrances, occupations, manifestations, harassment, fax- and telephone blockades, ... : at the fair, in the hotels of the participants, at their banquets/dinners, at the office of AFCEA in Brussels, ...
- political pressure : resolutions in the parliament against arms fairs and against arms lobby groups, politicians as participants in actions and putting pressure on owners of facilities where the fair was held
- petitions amongst organisations, celebrities and artists
- direct pressure on owners of facilities where the fair could be held (they got kicked out of one of them)
- pressreleases and campaigning 'newsletters' for activists of supporters.

Thanks to this campaign, the Armed Forces Communications and Electronics Association (AFCEA) has finally moved its fair to Brno. Their first attempt to move the fair to Den Haag didn't succeed because of political pressure from sympathising Belgian politicians and the efforts of Dutch peace-organisations.

We tried to stimulate people in the Tsjech Republic to start a campaign against the fair and asked Belgian politicians to get in touch with their Tsjech colleagues to convince them to stop the fair, but due to the lack of contacts with peace-campaigners in the Tsjech republic and due to a different political situation, the fair went on. We did have an occupation of the AFCEA-office in Brussels the week before the start of the fair : we took over the office to have an international conference on alternatives to military conflict resolution. We also started an international e-mail action which asks AFCEA to stop their activities. AFCEA's response is getting 'professional', trying to build up a clean image.

The topics of the symposia during the arms fair are strongly linked to NATO, its politics and the NATO-enlargement (with Brno as a more than symbolic place), which might make the fair interesting to ENAAT.

Production of high technological arms

In Flanders there is hardly any production of conventional arms, but a very strong and quickly growing industry of high technological arms systems. Flanders is one of the trendsetters on this domain. These arms systems are produced by mainly civil companies. Before Forum Voor Vredesactie started campaigning on this topic, nor the public nor the government believed there was such a thing as an arms industry in Flanders. The main aims of our campaign against these firms : to stop the trade and production (+ reconversion to civil production) and to stop any governmental support to / investment in companies who

also invest in military production.

The elements in our campaign in 1998 :

A short survey to get an overview of all the companies that have connections with the military market. This survey led to a list of fifty companies, which were 'exposed' in a booklet that FVV released to the press. At one of the biggest companies, Alcatel Bell, we did a symbolic press action + press conference as the start of the campaign (Alcatel develops military communication systems). A few weeks later, we went to the shareholders meeting of Barco to ask some sticky questions about their involvement in the arms production (Barco produces high quality screens for the military market). They didn't let us ask all of our questions, so we sued them for breaching the laws about shareholders. On the 19th of April the judge will decide whether or not our demands will be accepted. On the political level, some sympathising members of parliament introduced a resolution (proposition to change the law) to make certain types of support from government to companies which (also) make military products impossible. We also did a symbolic action at the Flemish Parliament, in support of the introduction of the resolutions. We started a co-campaign with an organisation that deals with ethical economics and ethical investment. This allows us to put a stronger pressure on the companies to stop their military activities.

Questions towards ENAAT

We're interested in an exchange-system of information about arms fairs and arms producers (mainly high-tech).

Other AFCEA activities in Europe : in Munich in spring, in October in London (?) ACTIONS !!!

We miss an international information supply on the evolutions on the market of high tech arms. Can the ENAAT network be a medium ? What do we need ? Information about 'Belgian' companies who get international contracts.

To all European Peace organisations; we are looking for information about 'our' military industry! If you find information about new military contracts of one of these companies, please let us know!

Alcatel Bell

BARCO

Bombardier Eurorail / BN

Clark Masts Teksam Group

VCoil-Lundy Europe

Comauto

Delft Sensor Systems - OIP

Dinamec

E2S n.v. - Software engineering

Fabrisys

Lernout & Hauspie Speechproducts (LHSP)

SABCA Limburg

SAIT Systems

Seyntex

Siemens Oostkamp

Siemens ATEA