

## **Tom Anderson - DIY Research workshop Notes**

- Corporate Watch is a research group investigating corporations and corporate power and exposing the negative effects corporations have on people and the environment
- My research has largely focussed on companies profiting from the Israeli occupation of Palestine
- I have also conducted research into the arms trade and into repression of dissent in the UK
- Much of my information has been gained from doing field investigations and that's what I am going to focus on today
- before starting research it is important to know what you're looking for and why you want to know
- research could be for an article, book or a report. Or it could be aimed at launching a campaign or organising an action against a company or against a type of corporate practice
- its also important to think about when you want the company to know that you are looking into them.
- If a company knows they are being watched they can destroy information to cover up wrongdoing and begin to think up strategies to limit the impact of your research.
- for example one arms company removed every reference to a piece of equipment that it manufactures from its website on the day that they realised they were attracting public scrutiny.
- Campaigners were able to uncover this as the pages had been saved by web archiving site, the way back machine
- A lot of the other speakers are going to talk to you about the things that you can find out through desk research
- Corporate Watch's research in Palestine has largely been done by going to Israel and Palestine and conducting research in the field
- By going into Israeli settlements and seeing which companies are working there, by observing Israel's apartheid wall and surveillance technology and tracking the companies providing goods and services
- and by talking to Palestinians about the effect of these corporations on their lives and communities and the need for campaigners to boycott and campaign against them.
- I'm going to talk largely about the value of getting away from the computer and doing research in the field
- I'm going to do this through my experience of research in Israel/Palestine and the UK
- First of all it can be invaluable to visit a company's offices
- By doing this you can observe the people going in and out and the companies who provide services to support your target companies business.

- These business partnerships cannot necessarily be found out through desk research
- Don't underestimate the value of going through the bins, valuable information about an arms company was gained when a shredded document containing private minutes from a meeting attended by the board of directors was passed on to me by an intrepid dumpster diver.
- Industry events are another area where invaluable information can be found
- At expos, conferences, exhibitions and award ceremonies corporations put information on their stands which may not appear anywhere else.
- It is the information they want their customers and business partners to see, away from the PR spin.
- You can often gain access to these events by simply registering. Others accept students or journalists. For other events you may have to concoct a cover story.
- Advertising material which arms companies give out to their customers at private arms fairs has proved invaluable to researchers and to anti-militarists
- For example, arms companies are much more open in the material they give out to customers – advertising illegal equipment, or illegal applications of their equipment
- You might also get some off the cuff comments from corporate executives as they're enjoying the free champagne
- Another important source of information about a company is from the staff
- Corporate Watch's information and critique of Israeli agricultural companies exploiting occupied Palestine is largely from the accounts of Palestinian workers, who are only too happy to dish the dirt on their employers
- They were willing to speak to us as we were involved in struggling alongside them and they saw our research as furthering their aims
- We've also obtained statements from ex-employees of arms companies and from the banking and pharmaceutical industry
- Its also worth talking to trade unionists. Make sure you talk to both the national branch of the trade union and the local branch members as their knowledge and viewpoints may differ dramatically
- Make sure you respect the people who provide you with information. Never use that information for purposes which they have not intended and respect their anonymity
- This makes it more likely others will speak to you in the future
- This information from workers and worker's organisations is important in forming a picture of the companies activities and providing context which can be used by the public to critique and take action against them.
- Campaigners have been able to persuade several customers of these companies to sever links with these companies on the basis of these interviews and similar information.

-Corporate Watch has also carried out interviews with public sector workers whose services are being privatised as a resource for anti-privatisation campaigners.

-Its also useful to talk to other people who are/will be losing out from a company's activities.

-Corporate Watch interviewed Palestinians whose land had been expropriated to make way for Israeli settlement agriculture and who were forbidden from accessing water while agro-industry had as much as they needed.

-We also spoke to people who have been on the receiving end of weapons and equipment manufactured by international companies. For example, those who have been injured, maimed or lost loved ones due to the Israeli army's use of US supplied tear gas and those who had been locked up without trial and tortured in facilities which G4S provides services to.

-Quotes from these interviews have been used by campaigners around the world resisting these corporations

-Back in the UK we have carried out interviews of the people being forced into work placements under the government's work programme.

-Again, this provides the necessary ammunition for the public to take action over a company's activities.

-When you have suspicions about a company and you are ready for them to know that you're researching them, go to the company and see what they say.

-We have often done this in the form of an open letter to the corporation which we have published on our website.

-Often their PR staff will confirm your suspicions. For instance, this year Corporate Watch was passed Morrisons labels by Palestinian workers in an Israeli settlement who were putting them on packets of dates. When we put this to Morrisons the company confirmed that this was taking place but blamed it all on their Israeli supplier.

-In trying to get themselves off the hook, PR people often let other useful information slip.

-When corporations receive letters from people like us they may try to limit damage. They might threaten you with libel. Or they may enter into a process of engagement to delay and ameliorate criticism

-Don't delay – get a critical view of the company out there while its still relevant and while its still relevant

-Finally, Be aware of who might be watching you while you are watching the corporations.

-Companies hire spies to spy on researchers and campaigners. Police place undercover officers within activist movements.

-Corporate Watch researchers have been repeatedly stopped and questioned about our research under Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act – an act that makes it illegal not to answer questions (unless you have a lawful excuse not to)

-One researcher had his door kicked in and was arrested after he had paid for documents at the companies house website

-He was questioned about a direct action campaign which had been launched against the company, the only evidence was the companies house search

-On the internet we often use corporate service providers to conduct our research. Unless we take precautions to protect our anonymity we run the risk that our research and our sources will be monitored and that we will be adding to the massive corporate data mining operation going on every day.