

The Battle in the Commons

The Companies Bill entered the House of Commons for its third reading on 17 October, when MPs finally got to vote on the amendments put forward by the Corporate Responsibility (CORE) coalition.

6 July 2006

It was a key moment in the campaign that Traidcraft has been running since 2003, together with CORE and the Trade Justice Movement. All through the spring and summer campaigners have been sending postcards to their MPs, as well as meeting with and lobbying them directly.

As a result, the debate on the [second reading of the Bill](#) in June was dominated by issues raised by the campaign, and 225 MPs signed Early Day Motion 697 supporting our stance.

The Bill passed into a committee stage where more amendments were proposed and again, pressure from campaigners kept our concerns on the table despite stiff opposition and the Parliamentary break over the summer.

By the eve of the Third Reading, our proposals were still included in the text, against all the odds and [strong lobbying](#) by business leaders supportive of the status quo.

Traidcraft and CORE were in the thick of the action, staging a series of crucial events and briefing MPs in the days before the vote. We were backed by huge numbers of you emailing your MP and demanding to make companies accountable for their impacts on people and the planet.

A last minute success

What followed was three days of intense debates over the Bill, which is the largest in Parliamentary history.

Amazingly, at the last moment Margaret Hodge, the Minister responsible for the Bill and the recipient of more than 100,000 campaign cards, introduced an important new clause. It required companies on the UK stock exchange to report on contractual relationships which were important to the success of the business, including with their suppliers.

This meant that the way companies treat their suppliers could be scrutinised, as well as the way suppliers themselves behave; for example that they conform to minimum environmental and animal welfare rules.

Predictably, sectors of industry cried foul at this late inclusion and [tried to block it](#), despite having previously agreed to more stringent rules under 'Operating and Financial Review' laws (which were dropped by Gordon Brown to please business leaders earlier this year, even though they had already been made law).

Business leaders met with senior members of the cabinet, but it was too late: CORE's proposals were passed in a full Commons vote and will go to the House of Lords for the last leg before becoming law.

Thank you for your support

A huge well done is due to all of you who have supported the campaign, as it was the massive weight of public opinion on MPs and ministers that has got us this far.

As Patrick Hall MP said,

"Directors' duties have attracted a great deal of attention outside Parliament. The public response to the issue has been one of the largest of all time. The Minister for Industry has been inundated by the cards generated by the Corporate Responsibility Coalition and the Trade Justice Movement. I congratulate those two umbrella organisations on their campaign, and I thank the many members of the public who have flagged up their views, both to the Department [for Trade and Industry] and to individual MPs around the country."