UK disability campaigners have unearthed new evidence that proves the German government’s lack of pharmaceutical regulations led to the devastating Thalidomide scandal.

Despite there being more than two dozen separate pieces of evidence pointing to the drug being associated with birth defects, it was mass marketed across Europe, Scandinavia, Australia, America and Canada.

However, at the time Germany was virtually the only major European country not to have any pharmaceutical regulations.

As a result, at least 2,000 babies in the UK were born with deformities brought about directly by Thalidomide – which was administered to women to combat the effects of morning sickness – and more than half of them died within their first year.

It is estimated that for every live birth, at least five foetuses died in the womb.

Members of the Thalidomide campaign team, led by the Thalidomide Trust’s National Advisory Council (NAC), said the evidence obtained by them shows clearly that, far from being an innocent bystander, the German Government was complicit by creating the environment that allowed the disaster to occur.

In 1970, nine years after the drug was withdrawn in the UK, the German Government was then directly involved in bringing a trial against Thalidomide manufacturer, Chemie Grunenthal, to a premature end, thereby concealing the evidence and, to make matters worse, protected Grunenthal from being subsequently sued.
The campaigners claim that almost two years before the trial was halted, secret negotiations took place between the Federal and (North Rhine-Westphalia) State governments with Grunenthal, to stop the trial before the most damning evidence about their prior knowledge of the high risks of damage to the foetus could be presented in court.

NAC chair and leading Thalidomide campaigner Nick Dobrik said: “This new evidence is a major breakthrough for us in our campaign for compensation from the German Government.

“We have incontrovertible documentary evidence of the German Government’s interference in the judicial process.

“Indeed, the civil servants' advice at that meeting in the late 1960s was that what was happening in these negotiations was a manipulation of the running criminal trial.

“The evidence shows the German Government's interference wasn't legally permissible and it was clearly morally wrong.”

Mr Dobrik added: “Disturbingly, the person who made the decision to close the trial was Justice Minster Neuberger, who was also a partner in the legal firm defending Grunenthal!

“As a result of this information being concealed, and so not available to lawyers in the UK, the consequences for British Thalidomide survivors were disastrous.”

Mr Dobrik, who was born with bilateral radial club hands, shortened forearms with short ulnas, no functional thumbs and a reduction to his left humerus, said this led the beleaguered parents of UK Thalidomide survivors to being forced to settle for just 40 per cent of the quantum, out of court, in 1972.

This story was told in a recent BBC2 Documentary Thalidomide - The Fifty Year Fight.
But, he claimed, if the truth had not been suppressed in Germany, the initial UK settlement would have been both sooner and significantly higher, and much of the subsequent additional health damage arising out of under-funding would have been minimised.

He said: “It would appear the current German Government is ill-informed in the assertion it makes, that there was no interference in the independence of the judiciary, in the standard reply being sent to British MPs.

“To put it bluntly, the German Government is misleading our Parliament and this evidence will, we believe, significantly strengthen our case for a financial settlement from the German Government.”

The remaining 469 UK thalidomide survivors are this week writing to their MPs asking them to lobby the Minister for Europe, David Lidington, and the Minister for Care and Support, Norman Lamb.

These Ministers are being asked to liaise directly with their counterparts in the German Government and also their peers in their respective Council of Ministers in Europe.

The Thalidomide campaigners have had an initial, fruitful, meeting with a senior civil servant in the German Ministry for Families, and are awaiting a promised high level meeting with the German Ministry of Health.

-ends-

For further information, please contact:

Nick Dobrik, London: 07904 981814
Mikey Argy, South East: 07875 084320
Liz Buckle, Scotland: 01631 760331
Steve Sinclair 07415 006883
Craig Millward, South Yorkshire: 07504 409520
Guy Tweedy, North Yorkshire: 07768 350066

David Simister, Different PR, on 0845 389 26 26/ 07870 550 760
E-mail: thefiftyyearfight@yahoo.co.uk
Twitter: @fiftyyearfight
www.fiftyyearfight.org

Notes

(1) The National Advisory Council (NAC) is the democratically elected body representing all accepted beneficiaries of the Thalidomide Trust in the UK. It is made up of 12 Thalidomide survivors. Members have actively taken part in and supported all the successful campaign activity since 2004 including the current campaign.

(2) This Campaign is focused solely on the German Government.