

A REPLACEMENT FOR TRIDENT?

Can you guess who said *"The government say there is no money to create jobs, but they have spent billions of pounds on dangerous nuclear weapons. They got us into an unnecessary and expensive war. This isn't sense; it's insanity. We believe in defence but we don't believe in costly and dangerous Trident and Cruise missiles. Care and compassion have become dirty words for this government but we have a completely different view of where Britain should be going."*?

Trident is Britain's nuclear weapon system. The Navy has 4 nuclear-armed submarines based at Faslane in the West of Scotland. One sub is on operational patrol at all times. Each Trident submarine carries 48 nuclear warheads, each of which can be sent to a different target and each with an explosive power of up to 100 kilotons, 8 times the power of the atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima in 1945 and killed an estimated 140,000 people.

The operational lifetime of the Trident nuclear weapon system is 30 years. The four Trident submarines entered into service between 1994-2001 and so it is expected that they will begin to be decommissioned around 2024. The Government has announced that the decision whether to replacement of Trident will be made during this parliament, as development will have to start by around 2010 in order for a system to be ready by 2024.

There is little public accountability about the Trident system and British nuclear weapons policy as a whole. Until 1995, the Trident programme was subject to the Defence Select Committee's annual inquiries on the "Progress of the Trident Programme". Since Labour came into power in 1997, the British government has abandoned the publication of such annual statements.

Trident is closely tied to the US; in fact the missiles themselves are leased from the US, an arrangement called "rent-a-rocket" by former Foreign Secretary Denis Healey. One of the key factors in shaping UK nuclear policy in the coming years will be the major changes taking place in US defence policy. The US has recently published a new draft "Doctrine for Joint Nuclear Operations" which would enshrine pre-emption into nuclear doctrine, lower the threshold for nuclear use, approve a role for nuclear weapons against all forms of weapons of mass destruction, and see a role for nuclear force even when the US is threatened by conventional weapons.

The document replaces "war" with "conflict" as a likely scenario for nuclear first use and sanctions a role for nuclear weapons against terrorists, or against states that "support their efforts". The doctrine requires the approval of Defense Secretary Rumsfeld. Kate Hudson, Chair of CND UK says *"It is nothing but nuclear terrorism, designed to control and determine the actions of other states through instilling the fear in them of nuclear annihilation. The US is taking the world to the brink of nuclear anarchy."* Remember that the USA is the only country ever to explode nuclear weapons in war. It is also not necessary to actually explode a nuclear weapon to use it belligerently, just as waving a gun during a bank robbery is still use of the weapon even if no shots are fired.

Meanwhile the Blair government, which does exactly as it is told by President Bush and his war-mongering cronies like Rumsfeld, is already spending hundreds of millions of pounds to refit the production line to produce more nuclear warheads at Aldermaston. Britain cannot afford nuclear weapons. The cost of a replacement for Trident is likely to be over £15bn. Think of the positive benefits could that amount bring to the world if spent on health, education and the ending of poverty...

In the past, nuclear weapons were justified by some as a response to the perceived threat of the Soviet Union. But, even if we accept that spurious argument, what nuclear threat faces this country now? It is true some other nations possess nuclear weapons, but they have neither the technology nor the motivation to attack Britain. We may face a threat from terrorists, but what good are nuclear weapons against them?

"Enough of the illusion that the problems of the world can be solved by nuclear weapons. Bombs may kill the hungry, the sick and the ignorant, but they cannot kill hunger, disease and ignorance." (Fidel Castro 1979).

A programme to replace Britain's nuclear weapons fails on the pragmatic grounds of expense and its unsuitability to the 21st Century world. But most importantly, nuclear weapons are immoral. A replacement for Trident would not be right even if it was affordable and apparently answered the questions the world will face in the future.

WEB LINKS:

CND UK: www.cnduk.org

CND Scotland has information about Trident: www.banthebomb.org

Trident Ploughshares campaign against nuclear weapons in the UK: www.tridentploughshares.org

Block The Builders oppose the construction of new facilities at Aldermaston: www.blockthebuilders.org.uk

And the answer to the question at the top?

It was Tony Blair, in 1983.



HMS Vanguard leaving Faslane, fully armed with nuclear weapons. (CND Scotland)

HAFOD QUARRY NEWS

Members of Hafod Quarry Liaison Committee have been campaigning for years against applications by Mersey Waste Holdings (MWH) to turn the old Hafod quarry, part of which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and home to rare greater crested newts, into a landfill site.

Hafod Action Group and Hafod Environmental Group won a high court action in June against the Welsh Assembly. Although Wrexham County Borough Council (WCBC) had turned down MWH's application to vary the conditions of planning permission granted in 1995, the Welsh Assembly granted the application on appeal, giving the go-ahead for landfill at the site. However, the campaigners went to the High Court in London, where it was decided that the Welsh Assembly had acted wrongly and the appeal decision was overturned. The protesters were awarded all costs.

MWH immediately announced that it would go ahead with landfill under the original planning permission, and the Hafod campaigners intend to challenge this. Their barrister has already written to the council and to the Welsh Assembly to explain why the landfill cannot legally go ahead under the original 1995 permission.

On top of this threat, WCBC has now made a shock announcement that the site will be needed under its own Regional Waste Plan to dump local waste, although this Plan states clearly that landfill sites must be placed well away from local housing. What's more, MWH has always maintained that the site would be solely for their own use, and the council has never previously expressed any interest in using the site for local landfill. Indeed, WCBC has over the years turned down numerous planning applications for landfill at the site.

Elected members of the communities have attended Hafod Quarry Liaison Committee for years, and no mention has been made of this plan by them, by councillors or by officers of the council. The Liaison Committee is now considering taking the matter to the Ombudsman.

OBITUARY: JOSEPH ROTBLAT

Every peace campaigner will mourn the death of this amazing scientist. Here is one assessment: "*Joseph Rotblat was a towering figure in the search for peace in the world, who dedicated his life to rid the world of nuclear weapons, and ultimately to rid the world of war itself.*" That came from the current President of the international Pugwash Conference, a movement founded in 1957 to bring together scientists on both sides of the Cold War for serious non-polemical discussion of the nuclear menace.

Born in Warsaw in 1908, Rotblat came to Britain in 1939 for a scientific career. Worried that Nazi Germany might be working on producing a nuclear weapon, Rotblat thought that if USA could produce one in advance it would be a deterrent, and he joined the Manhattan Project. He was uneasy about this, when he considered the implications, and when the German venture was seen to have failed, he left and returned to Britain where at the end of the war, some tried to suggest he had become pro-Soviet. Working with Bertrand Russell he signed the Russell/Einstein Manifesto which warned the world that if plans for nuclear war continued, civilisation would be utterly destroyed.

In spite of all the suspicions, Pugwash became an important factor on the world scene. It helped to produce the Partial Test Ban Treaty of 1963, and in 1955 Rotblat, together with Pugwash, won the Nobel Peace Prize, and even the British government saw to it that he received the C.B.E. That, and his knighthood, did not prevent him from continuing to campaign, not just against nuclear weapons, but against the whole war system. He became President of the Movement for the Abolition of War, and together with Professor Robert Hinde published two years ago an important book "War No More: Eliminating conflict in the nuclear age". We have seen the passing of a very great man.



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