

# UK ON IRAN - NUCLEAR HYPOCRISY

The news in recent weeks has been dominated by coverage of Iran's proposed nuclear programme. Although its stated intention is to develop a civil nuclear power facility, we are told that Iran might well use the plutonium produced in the reactor to make warheads. It might. This potential exists for any state with nuclear technology and should be of grave concern to us all. Alongside the media frenzy over Iran's nuclear developments, another nuclear story has also grabbed a lot of media attention recently, namely how a new generation of nuclear power stations might be the only way to solve the UK's energy crisis. I have not heard a single TV or radio report make reference to the link between civil and military nuclear programmes in the UK although the two have always been inextricably linked. At Sellafield, for example, spent fuel from both civil and military UK reactors is reprocessed together into plutonium, some of which is then sent to Aldermaston to be turned into nuclear warheads. Double standards? Judge for yourself.

This February, the Sellafield nuclear reprocessing plant in Cumbria received a formal warning from the European Commission Inspectors for the second time in as many years after British Nuclear Group (BNG), the plant operators, were found to be in breach of safeguard standards. An earlier inquiry in 2000 found that safety records at the plant had been falsified. The Commission stressed that proper accounting and reporting procedures must be in place to prevent nuclear materials from being diverted from declared peaceful purposes. Last year BNFL, the parent company of BNG, was also forced to admit that 30kg of weapons-grade plutonium was unaccounted for at Sellafield. Did you hear that on the news? I did, just once. Imagine the coverage if this discovery had been made in Iran.

Meanwhile, at Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) Aldermaston in Berkshire, development is underway on a new £5.3m laser testing facility, which will enable a new generation of nuclear weapons to be designed and tested in blatant contravention of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to which we are signatories. This development is being opposed with a series of direct actions by the "Block the Builders" campaign. To get involved or to make a donation to the campaign, visit [www.blockthebuilders.org](http://www.blockthebuilders.org), call 07969 739812 or email [btb@aldermaston.net](mailto:btb@aldermaston.net).

Right next door to us here in Wrexham, the Urenco plant at Capenhurst, Cheshire, enriches uranium for use in British nuclear power stations. Urenco's motto is 'Enriching the Future'. Indeed. The waste product from this process is known as depleted uranium (DU), widely used in anti-tank shells and smaller munitions. DU now pollutes large areas of the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq as well as the area around Kirkcudbright in Scotland where DU weapons have been tested, and illegal nuclear dumping sites in Russia. Urenco has sent over 75,000 tons of DU to Russia in the last 10 years. Such imports for storage are illegal in Russia, but the company arranges the return of small quantities of the reprocessed material and no-one seems to notice that the other 98% of the waste stays there. Containers used to transport the DU don't meet International Atomic Energy Agency standards; this poses risks in transit as well as at the dump where the containers can corrode and leak.

Civilians in all these areas are suffering from illnesses and diseases linked with exposure to radiation, and many women miscarry or their babies have birth defects. Soldiers who have served in areas where DU munitions have been used have reported similar problems and in 2004 a Gulf War veteran was awarded a full war pension on the grounds of DU poisoning. As depleted uranium has a half-life of about 4.5 billion years, this pollution is forever. The use of DU weapons and the dumping of DU are crimes against humanity. More information about DU can be found in WPJN issues 2 and 6, (online at [www.wpjf.org.uk](http://www.wpjf.org.uk)) or at [www.cadu.org.uk](http://www.cadu.org.uk).



*Urenco, 'Enriching the Future' (company motto) at Capenhurst nuclear plant near Chester*

Another argument used against Iran is that it is not responsible enough to be trusted with nuclear power. Jack Straw said recently: "Until they clarify their intentions, we don't believe that it is safe for them to have full access to the nuclear cycle," the sort of thing you can only say if your own house is in order, notwithstanding the fact that the nuclear cycle is inherently unsafe. All the above indicates that Britain is not acting safely or responsibly and cannot be trusted. But there are many other worrying examples of safety breaches in nuclear Britain.

Britain's nuclear warheads are made at Burghfield near Aldermaston; unmarked but very obvious military convoys take these on public roads to the nuclear submarine base at Faslane in Scotland. Each vehicle can contain up to 8kg of plutonium. Warheads are returned by the same route for refitting and refurbishment. There are no radiation symbols on the vehicles and local authorities are not told when the convoys will be passing through. Every journey poses the risk of accident or sabotage with potentially apocalyptic results. Nuke-watch monitors and campaigns against these convoys. For more information, contact Manchester CND on 0161 273 8283 or visit [www.nukewatch-scotland.org.uk](http://www.nukewatch-scotland.org.uk).

In a recent court case, atomic energy company AEA Technology was fined a quarter of a million pounds after a plug was carelessly left off a container transporting highly radioactive material 130 miles between a hospital in Leeds and Sellafield in Cumbria. As a result, the flask leaked a beam of gamma rays towards the road for the whole journey.

# A RECKLESS AND IRRESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT

A radiation inspector at the Health and Safety Executive said: "Anyone exposed to the beam coming from the container could have... exceeded the legal dose limit within seconds and suffered radiation burns within minutes." The judge in the case condemned staff at AEA, a privatised part of the UK Atomic Energy Agency, for acting in a "cavalier and somewhat indifferent" way and with a "degree of arrogance" towards their duties. Staff had ticked boxes to say they had completed tasks which had not been carried out.

Following protests and occupations by local people at Vieques in Puerto Rico, which has been used by the US as a military testing site for 50 years, the US Navy has been looking for other places to practise its deadly war games. The UK government kindly agreed that it could use Cape Wrath for exercises in February and March this year, to the consternation of anti-nuclear campaigners and many members of the Scottish Parliament. When locals managed to reclaim the bomb testing site in Vieques, they discovered serious environmental damage and pollution; also, the US Navy admitted that DU munitions had "accidentally" been fired at the site, 267 in total which is more than one accident. The Cape Wrath firing range is an important site for wildlife; rare birds such as golden eagles frequent the area and the highest vertical sea cliffs in mainland Britain are home to a huge seabird colony. Toxic residues from explosives and metal casings are likely to affect these local inhabitants, and there are concerns that DU rounds could "accidentally" have been fired here too.

It is clear that we are dealing with a reckless and irresponsible government which allows UK inhabitants and those of other countries to be poisoned by its radioactive waste, weapons and leaks. If the government won't protect us, we have to take matters into our own hands. One way we can do this is to challenge mainstream media reporting on the safety and desirability of nuclear power. We can support campaigns like Nukewatch and Block the Builders. We can campaign against our nearest nuclear installations. We can point out the hypocrisy of the threats being made against Iran.



*Theatre of War -  
Illustration for Faslane 365 Resources Pack*

There is also a new nationwide campaign which aims to disarm the UK's nuclear submarines and stop the government going ahead with a £40 billion replacement for Trident. It hopes to achieve this through a year-long programme of campaigning and direct action. Faslane 365 is a mass non-violent civil resistance project which aims to blockade Faslane naval base in Scotland, where the Trident submarines are housed, every day for a year. In order to do this, the campaign is asking for activists from all over the country to form groups, each of which could undertake a 48 hour blockade of the base. There is a role for everyone according to their circumstances and ability - from signing a statement of support, to letter writing, fund-raising and supporting from home, to blockading the nuclear base in Scotland. It is hoped that there will be an all-Wales contingent of at least 100 people prepared to form a blockade group. Could you, or a group you are involved in, support this campaign? For more information, go to: [www.faslane365.org](http://www.faslane365.org), email: [info@faslane365.org](mailto:info@faslane365.org) or call: 01263 512049. We may host a Faslane 365 information meeting in Wrexham. If this goes ahead it will be held on Wed. May 17th. Call us **now** if you'd like to be involved in this.

