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# NUCLEAR POWER? WPJF PUBLIC MEETING

Three speakers addressed our public meeting on 11th September: Jill Evans, MEP and chair of CND Cymru, Hugh Richards of the Welsh Anti-Nuclear Alliance (WANA) and Richard Bramhall of the Low Level Radiation Campaign (LLRC). Between them, they looked at the risks and dangers associated with nuclear installations, critically examined the pro-nuclear arguments, and condemned Blair's plans to renew Britain's nuclear deterrent and to build a new generation of nuclear power stations.

Jill Evans spoke about her recent visit to the Ukraine to visit the site of the world's worst nuclear accident at Chernobyl. In the European Parliament, Jill and others have been calling for a full-scale independent inquiry into the effects of the Chernobyl disaster, not just in the immediate locality, but worldwide. Without that information it is impossible to have an honest debate about the real costs of nuclear power.

A scaremongering campaign in Finland, which painted a picture of freezing homes and dependence on Russia for energy, was used to persuade the Finnish Parliament to support a new nuclear power station. Although pro-nuclear lobbyists swore that energy efficiency measures and investment in renewables would not suffer, this is exactly what has happened. When the government agreed to buy the new nuclear power station, the plans weren't even finalised, which has led to a year-long delay in building, the wrong sort of concrete being used, and worries about safety of the still unfinished plant. Jill said: "*Nuclear power belongs to the past. It is an experiment that failed and it can have no place in our future. It's not sustainable, it's not cheap, and it's not safe.*"

The link between nuclear power and nuclear weapons cannot be ignored and the separation of civil and military aspects is a myth. Jill expressed her disgust at the hypocrisy of the British Government, keen to condemn Iran for the possible military exploitation of its nuclear power programme, but not seeing any contradiction between this and its own plans to renew our nuclear weapons system, in spite of Britain being signed up (for the past 37 years or so) to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which places a specific duty on us to disarm.

Britain currently has a fleet of four nuclear-powered and nuclear-armed submarines based at the Clyde Naval base in Faslane, Scotland. Each submarine carries 16 Trident II D5 missiles, leased from the USA, and each of these carry three nuclear warheads - 48 per submarine. Each warhead is eight times more powerful than the bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima killing over 100,000 people.

There are many indications that the government intends to press ahead with a replacement for Trident, including the new laser testing facility for nuclear weapons which is being built at AWE Aldermaston and the 2005 Labour Party manifesto which gave a commitment to retain Britain's nuclear arsenal. Replacing Trident will be hugely expensive (an estimated £25 billion) as well as illegal and immoral.

Jill urged people to join the Faslane 365 campaign of civil resistance starting on October 1. The demand of Faslane 365 is: "*Trident must be taken out of deployment and*

*the government should make a timetable for dismantling the weapons, together with a commitment not to develop any new nuclear weapons*". Blockaders from all over the country will disrupt the day to day running of the base for periods of 48 hours each. Wales is undertaking blockades, between 13-15 November. Jill will be taking part in these Welsh blockades and urges other Welsh people to join this inspiring campaign.

Hugh Richards continued the theme of Welsh resistance, describing how Wales acted as an inspiration to anti-nuclear campaigners everywhere in 1982 when all local authorities united under the Nuclear-Free Wales banner.

The 2002 energy review recommended a radical approach to reducing energy use in Britain, with the Government White Paper calling for a truly sustainable energy policy. Unfortunately, it didn't last very long, with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) publishing its own paper which marked the start of a concerted campaign to soften up public opinion in favour of nuclear power. Although there was nothing in the 2005 Labour manifesto about nuclear power stations, Blair announced another energy review last year, specifically to include nuclear power. A secret DTI plan mentions eight possible sites for new nuclear power stations, with Wylfa and other Welsh sites amongst them.

Referring back to Jill's example of the scandal surrounding the new Finnish nuclear power station, as well as lies about nuclear power not requiring public subsidy and unrealistic estimates of overall cost at the start of nuclear projects, Hugh stressed that the nuclear power industry will say anything and do anything to get political commitment to nuclear power stations. It really doesn't care what happens afterwards.

Hugh went on to explode the various myths which have been circulating about nuclear power. For instance, he showed that although nuclear power stations don't produce carbon dioxide in their reactors, a considerable amount of energy is used (and CO<sub>2</sub> produced) in the mining and milling of uranium, which will steadily increase as uranium reserves are used up and the industry will be forced to rely on increasingly poor quality uranium, requiring progressively greater amounts of energy to extract. Waste disposal will also use a lot of energy. Nuclear power is not the answer to global warming.

We are told by those in favour of nuclear power that new reactors are going to be safer, but Hugh revealed that the track record of pressurised water reactors is very poor. In plans for the latest reactors, safety measures which were regarded as essential for Sizewell B have been completely abandoned to keep costs down. So, if one of the new reactors should 'cook', there is no safety system to shut the reactor down, just some water for cooling, leaving the reactor very vulnerable to a disastrous nuclear accident.

The UK government's unwavering support for US foreign policy has ensured that we are a target, so a terrorist attack on a nuclear installation is not as improbable as we have been led to believe. We are told that nuclear reactors are tough enough to withstand terrorist attacks, but these claims are untested and unlikely to be true.

Nuclear power plants all produce quantities of nuclear waste, material which remains radioactive for hundreds of thousands of years. There are no acceptable ways of disposing of nuclear waste. All reactors need spent fuel stores, which are likely to be built underground at huge financial and energy cost, and with no guarantee of safety. Places with relatively low populations (like Wales) are likely to be chosen for such underground dumps. Hugh quoted Einstein, who once said: "A clever man solves a problem. A wise man avoids it." Indeed.

The final speaker was Richard Bramhall, who gave a fascinating but shocking talk about the human effects on health of our nuclear ventures, which he described as a matter of science versus propaganda. The International Commission on Radiological Protection (ICRP), for example, whose recommendations virtually have force of law in every country with nuclear power, actively denies many irrefutable facts about the health effects of nuclear tests, accidents and other events which have resulted in radioactive contamination of the environment.

Studies were made of the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki following the 1945 bombings, but these are flawed because they studied only those who survived the bombs (by definition not a representative sample of the population) and the control groups used in these studies were residents of the two communities who weren't present during the explosions, but who subsequently returned and would have been exposed to the effects of fallout. A separate early study which compared the residents of Hiroshima and Nagasaki with people living on the other side of a range of mountains showed the former to have three times as many cancers, but this study was closed down pretty quickly by the US.

From the early 1950s, atmospheric tests of much more powerful bombs were carried out, causing a global increase in fallout and a corresponding global 'blip' in cancers and infant mortality, evident in every country for which reliable data exists. In England and Wales, between 1954 and 1980 there were 37,000 more infant deaths than would have been expected given general improvements in the health of the population. Also, there was a big jump in the number of women with breast cancers, women who would have been developing breasts during the fifties. No-one has refuted these figures, but the ICRP says it couldn't happen.

Richard exposed the inadequacies of the 'average dose' model favoured by pro-nuclear scientists to back up claims that radioactive exposure is not terribly harmful. This model is, argued Richard, like saying that cigarette burns on the skin cannot harm you because if you averaged out the heat of the cigarette over the whole body, the increase in temperature would not be enough to cause any damage.

When a radioactive particle is ingested, a source of radiation is lodged in the body. This particle will constantly irradiate the victim, causing diseases such as cancers and leukaemia, or causing genetic damage which is passed on to the next generation. Since Chernobyl, local people have suffered from aggressive malignant tumours, leukaemias and diseases of the immune system, with children developing cataracts and digestive problems usually associated with old age. In the area around Trawsfynydd, where the lake used for angling

and watersports is radioactive, women under 50 are 15 times as likely to have cancer as the general population. In the Menai area, radioactive particles from Sellafield have become concentrated in the shallow mud banks of the Menai Strait, are blown inland as the mud dries out, and lodge in the bodies of the local population, causing leukaemias at 20 times the national average. Those exposed to depleted uranium used on battlefields have suffered a wide range of illnesses and their children have been born with malformations and tumours.

Richard concluded his talk with some suggestions:

- Don't listen to people who compare background radiation levels with man-made radioactive contamination. The analogy is spurious.
- Don't be fooled by bogus science, like that presented in the recent Horizon programme about Chernobyl. Tell people what's really happened to these people. Complain about these sort of programmes.
- Write and ask your MP to sign Early Day Motion 1464, which calls for a new committee on the health effects of ionising radiation to be set up.
- Use every available opportunity to ensure that the green movement understands the issues. At the moment this movement is disastrously split on the nuclear question.



(L-R) Chair of the meeting Brian Matthews with Jill Evans, Hugh Richards and Richard Bramhall in front of the WPJF banner

Following the speakers, questions and comments were taken from the floor. Issues discussed included the fact that Chapel Cross nuclear plant is just seven miles from where Pan Am flight 103 came down in Lockerbie; how best to build a movement to challenge any proposals to build new nuclear installations in Wales; a comment about government plans to speed up the licensing process and reduce planning restrictions in relation to nuclear plants; the use of new "anti-terror" legislation against peaceful anti-nuclear demonstrators.

Many thanks to the chair, the speakers and to all those who came along to the meeting.

**Useful links**  
**Faslane 365: [www.faslane365.org](http://www.faslane365.org)**  
**WANA: [www.kare-uk.org/wana-index.htm](http://www.kare-uk.org/wana-index.htm)**  
**LLRC: [www.llrc.org](http://www.llrc.org)**