

No to Trident nuclear weapons

THE OUTGOING Blair/Brown New Labour government won parliamentary support for the modernisation of the Trident system with support from the Tories. The Con-Dem coalition, however, seems to be split on Trident's replacement, with Nick Clegg apparently opposed to the huge costs involved and defence secretary Liam Fox in favour.

Ronnie Stevenson,
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The proposed new system, like the current version, will consist of US-made Trident missiles, based on four British-built submarines. The nuclear warheads will be manufactured at the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment (AWRE), Aldermaston. This nuke factory is already being modernised. The cost is secret, but estimated to be over £4 billion.

The bill for these weapons of mass destruction is likely to be around £25 billion for the system. But the total expenditure will be around £76 billion when running costs over 30 years are included.

There is little public support for the retention or modernisation of nuclear weapons. A clear majority in polls oppose the replacement of Trident.

Despite claims that we need to retain nuclear weapons as an "insurance policy" in an uncertain and dangerous world, the reality is that they make our lives more dangerous.

What is Britain's independent nuclear deterrent meant to deter? Nuclear threats do not come out of the blue. A threat from Russia or China, or from North Korea (which may have one or two crude nuclear bombs) would only arise as part of an extreme global crisis.

British imperialism's deterrent is currently just under 200 warheads, which would be a minor factor compared to the US superpower's massive nuclear arsenal of over 10,000 warheads. In any case, can we imagine a British government acting independently? When was the last time Britain acted without the approval of US imperialism?

The massive US arsenal didn't deter the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon. It hasn't enabled the Nato powers to enforce their own interests by dominating Afghanistan or the US superpower to avoid defeat in Iraq. The existing Trident system did not deter the

7/7 London tube and bus attacks in 2005.

The uncertain and dangerous world has arisen partly as a result of the military intervention of US and British imperialism and other powers in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere.

Instead of fostering stability and security, the upgrading of nuclear arsenals will give a new twist to the nuclear arms race, making the world even more unstable and dangerous. The bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945 killed over 100,000 - even one Trident warhead has eight times the destructive power of the Hiroshima bomb.

Alternative jobs

WORKERS AND communities in the area around Faslane, and in the defence industry generally who rely on the defence industry for jobs, rightly fear for the future should Trident be removed from the Clyde. The Clyde has become a producer of warships and a base for the maintenance of Britain's nuclear weapons. It is a far cry from when it produced 90% of the world's commercial ships.

Workers' fears have been heightened by the ruthless way in which the British government is setting about the destruction of whole areas of public services with no regard for the thousands who will lose their jobs. Similarly the private sector is laying off workers in their thousands.

But socialists argue that the skilled workforce could be used for other work. Workers now employed in nuclear weapons systems, together with scientists and engineers, should be redeployed on projects that bring real benefit to society.

Britain requires much raw materials and food to be brought in on ships and yet there are no competitive merchant shipbuilders on the Clyde.

The level of technology involved in nuclear weapons is amongst the most advanced in the world. The skills used to produce and maintain them could be used to make socially useful equipment for use in the NHS, transport and to enhance the lives of human beings.

The large scale resources could be used to develop tidal power technology to give but one example of a socially useful alternative.

There is no end to the ways in which the £76 billion could be better spent. We need to popularise the arguments against the retention of

nuclear weapons and for the development of alternative work for all those currently deployed on the nuclear weapons programme.

Nuclear free world?

AS SOCIALISTS we are against all nuclear weapons. So how can we build a world free from weapons of mass destruction? We certainly can't rely on capitalist institutions whether it's the UN, Nato or any other of the so-called international bodies that oversee the domination of the world by imperialism, to stop the spread of nuclear weapons. Their utter failure to stop the proliferation of such weapons shows that the major powers have no intention of carrying out nuclear disarmament.

That's because there are capitalist interests at stake; power, prestige, influence, markets and profits. The desire by the capitalist powers to build arms stockpiles is an inevitable extension of their economic interests, making wars and the squandering of billions on arms inevitable.

For this reason the eradication of nuclear weapons needs a change in the social system of capitalism. A new and democratic society based on public ownership of industry and workers' control and management would form the basis of a socialist planned economy. One of its first tasks would be to end the wasteful expenditure on arms proliferation.

Let's spend the £76 billion earmarked for Trident on defending public services, jobs, wages, health and education. And relegate the nuclear arms industry to where it belongs, the scrapyard of history.

- **No to the renewal of Trident. Scrap the existing Trident system.**
- **Radioactive material from warheads should be permanently disposed of as safely as possible.**
- **Workers employed in nuclear weapons production, together with scientists and engineers, should be redeployed on projects of real benefit to society.**
- **The £76 billion planned for the new nuclear weapons should be spent on defending public services, jobs and a future for our young people.**



The callous cutting of NHS Direct

FOR SOME months now staff at NHS Direct have known we were getting a new phone number. It has been seen as a positive move as reports suggested that three-quarters of people in England did not know the NHS Direct 0845 4647 number.

An NHS Direct worker

When Mike O'Brian was a health minister under the previous government he said: "Patients have told us that they need clear, easy advice on how to find health care when they don't need to go to A&E. We have asked Ofcom to consult on making a new national 111 number available for them." Three call centres were set up to trial the number.

So when staff at NHS Direct in Southampton received the news on 28 August that the government was scrapping NHS Direct and replacing it with NHS111 it was met with disbelief and confusion. It had been casually mentioned the previous day when health secretary Andrew Lansley was on a visit to a Basingstoke hospital but it was not until midday on the Saturday that the plan was confirmed.

The announcement being made over a bank holiday weekend caught both unions and bosses by surprise.

Senior management had, just an hour before, denied that anything was wrong.

In an interview on Sky Television in the afternoon, NHS Direct chief executive Nick Chapman was left red faced when he was forced to admit that NHS111 was going to replace NHS Direct and he could not say how many jobs would be lost. NHS Direct currently employs more than 3,000 staff, 40% of whom are trained nurses. The rest are health advisors, dental nurses, pharmacists and other health care professionals, as well as administration staff.

At the NHS111 call centres there are as few as one nurse for 25 non-qualified call operators. This will lead to a substantial loss in quality of service.

The timing of this announcement has shown NHS Direct staff the contempt the Con-Dem government has for the public services. A Unison steward said: "I have staff in tears all around the office with real fears for their jobs and no one cares."

People are already being affected. New staff recruitment has stopped and working hours have been frozen. Some people who were expecting to start work this week were told they are no longer required. Staff who recently took early retirement but have been re-employed on a bank basis have been told there will be no more work.



NHS Direct - another casualty of Con-Dem cuts.

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