

Briefing #4: Trident & Jobs

The case for scrapping Trident

Three years ago the joint STUC /Scottish CND report 'Trident and Jobs: the case for a Scottish Defence Diversification Agency' was launched at the STUC congress. The report provides a powerful case for scrapping Trident, and strong arguments that defence diversification would have a massively positive effect on jobs and employment. However, three years on the Westminster government is pushing ahead with Trident replacement. According to CND UK this will be at a cost of at least £205 billion. This money should be spent on jobs, homes, education and health, improving the lives of the British people without threatening the lives of others.

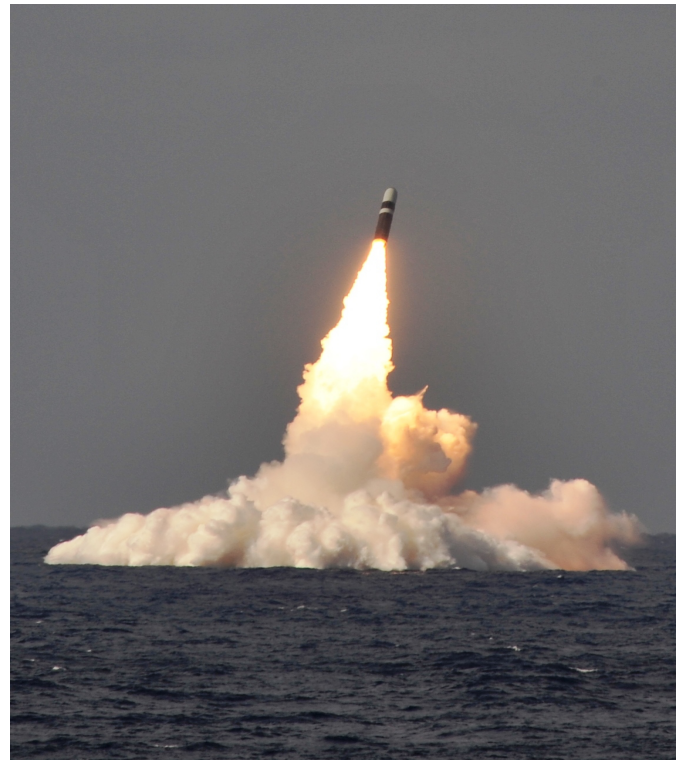
Nuclear weapons are a threat to us all

But the case against Trident isn't just a case for better jobs. A Unite Executive statement in 2010 summed up the wider case against Trident, saying:

The question of Britain's nuclear weapons system is not about employment alone, however. It is first of all a moral issue, and then a strategic one concerning Britain's place in the world and the international development we wish to see. Such weapons would, if used, constitute a mortal threat to humanity's survival; they are massively expensive; senior military figures have described them as 'militarily useless' and said that they should be scrapped; and our possession of them encourages other countries to seek a similar arsenal.

No time for business as usual

In the face of excellent policy positions in practice unions organising in the defence industry have continued to argue for the status quo. Elsewhere we argue that we are in the midst of developing crises in employment and in energy supply. And at the same time atmospheric carbon dioxide levels are now so high that the threat of catastrophic climate change is imminent. Business as usual is not an option.



A million climate jobs

It's time to combine the powerful economic and moral cases against Trident with the case for a major reorientation in economic activity that makes a rapid transition to a low carbon economy. This is not a fanciful notion. The Campaign Against Climate Change has worked through in detail how a million climate jobs across the UK could be paid for and could make the transition in short order. Defence diversification and a transition to a low carbon economy can work hand in hand. The workers and the skills that currently support Trident and other parts of the defence industries are an essential and necessary part of the transition.

Order the Million Climate Jobs pamphlet from the Campaign Against Climate Change or read it online at www.campaigncc.org

Jobs under threat

Jobs in the defence sector in Scotland are under threat with reduced frigate orders and the end of the aircraft carrier contracts. Arguing for the status quo in order to protect jobs has not been working and will not work in the future. Waiting for the private sector to intervene and invest in alternative construction jobs is also a strategy doomed to fail. Industries that aim for short term profit will not take the long-term decisions required.



Action for change

Change will have to be fought for. However, the time is right and there are openings we can exploit. In 2016 the Scottish Government nationalised the Ferguson shipyard on the Clyde. In the same year it announced a proposal to consider a state owned energy company. Jeremy Corbyn has made a commitment to set up a Defence Diversification Agency. A necessary sense of urgency could be injected with a campaign that unites trade unions, environmentalists and peace campaigners. A state energy company needs to be more than just a retailer of green energy. It could coordinate investment into production and distribution and planned long term retraining and training in the necessary skills for climate jobs. And in protecting jobs and creating new jobs it could win the argument with those workers in defence, construction and oil and gas who feel vulnerable to change.

If not now when?

To get such a campaign moving and transform policy into action requires urgent and democratic debate among the workforces involved and serious and sustained support from their unions and from environmental campaigns. The stakes are high but we have the possibility of taking a real lead in Scotland. In the words of Primo Levi – if not now when?

About Scot E3

E3 is a group of rank and file trade unionists, activists and environmental campaigners. In 2107 we made a submission to the Scottish Government's Consultation on a Scottish Energy Strategy. Since then we have been busy producing and sharing leaflets and bulletins.

We believe there is a compelling case for a radical shift in energy policy. Large numbers of jobs have been lost in the Scottish oil and gas sector. Nearly a third of Scottish households suffer from fuel poverty with the elderly worst affected. In 1989 primary energy capacity in Scotland was 45% more than the level of demand, yet we're heading for a serious shortfall in energy production by 2030. And looming over all this is the prospect of catastrophic climate change, which will wreck the future for our children and grandchildren.

The stakes couldn't be higher. However, we have the knowledge and the skills to make a difference to people's lives in the here and now. Leaving things to 'the market' is clearly not working. A sustainable future requires a coherent strategy for employment, energy and the environment. We need a sense of urgency. We need a coordinated strategy and massive public investment.

In Scotland we have a unique set of circumstances: a strong skills base; abundant resources for sustainable energy production; and an opportunity to develop a strategy that puts jobs and environment at the heart of economic strategy. What we do locally could be an inspiration for action worldwide.

