

Women's Internat. League for Peace + Freedom

Carol Fox

IRISH CONCERNS

It's very timely, this meeting, because you might have read yesterday in the newspapers about the fishing trawler which was sunk near Fishguard in early September. The family of the three fishermen who died are now going to sue the government who owns the submarine, because it's now believed that a submarine was responsible for bringing down that particular fishing boat. The Irish Sea has the biggest traffic jam for submarines in the world, something we don't realise because we don't see them. But they have been sinking fishing trawlers and I've handed out a chart from Bernard Moffat of the Celtic League, who has been monitoring what's been happening with submarines in the Irish Sea for the past six years. Another problem that we do not see is the damage to submarines themselves, the possibility of damage to the nuclear reactors or weapons on board the submarines.

Despite the I.N.F. agreement, there are no arms talks taking place about nuclear weapons at sea and that is where one third of the world's nuclear weapons are based. The five nuclear navies of the world are expanding enormously and the sea is becoming the focus of the arms race. The whole concept of nuclear war fighting has more appeal in the oceans where you're not actually wiping out cities and people. Obviously a few tactical nuclear weapons in the middle of the Atlantic might be more of a possibility, and the War Plans now take that into account.

The Irish Sea is extremely crowded because there are two major submarine bases in Northern Europe and both are in the Irish Sea, that's in the Clyde, in Holy Loch and in Faslane. At any one time one fifth of the entire American nuclear arsenal is in the Irish Sea. There are ten American Poseidon submarines with 160 warheads each located at Holy Loch. It is the only strategic base for such missiles held on foreign soil anywhere in the world. Also at Faslane you have the British Government's four Polaris submarines and nuclear powered hunter-killer submarines. The purpose of the strategic submarines is to try to get lost, to stay away from Soviet intelligence so that they can become active if a war breaks out. Previously all the submarines would go out towards the Norwegian Sea or the North Atlantic. In the past ten years the Soviet fleet has expanded, Soviet intelligence and surveillance has got much better, and they have spy ships based off the North coast of Northern Ireland watching the Clyde. The missiles the submarines shoot are much longer range now and so there is no need to go towards the Norwegian Sea, they can nuke the Russians from the Atlantic. This has meant that the number of incidents has risen dramatically because there are a lot more submarines in the Irish Sea. They are even more crowded because the nuclear submarines get the non-nuclear ones to accompany them out in order to confuse the spies even more. There are also the Royal Navy patrol subs which come out in order to detect Soviet naval activity and they have been pulling long radar called Towed Array Sonar Systems, which sometimes run for two miles behind the submarines near to the surface. A lot of fishing nets have been trapped in this and brought on rides by submarines. There have also been French and Soviet submarines coming into the Irish Sea. The submarines, to avoid satellite detection, hug the coastline. They are also travelling underneath tankers and car ferries. Last June in Larne a Sealink ferry, Galloway Princess, had to alter course at the same time as a Townsend ferry which actually went aground on a sandbank in order to avoid a submarine. This is going to get worse. There is an expansion at the submarine bases both at Holy Loch and Faslane and the building of the Trident submarines going on at Barrow at the moment. At

Barry there is a berth for Royal Navy nuclear powered subs in the event of any emergency with their nuclear propulsion, at Brawdy you have the biggest Navy sonar surveillance in the world and it is also the base for anti-submarine warfare aircraft and helicopters. Obviously if there was a nuclear war that's just one of the many nuclear targets that you're surrounded by.

There have been over 30 fishermen killed in submarine-related incidents. In the case of the Sharelga in 1982 it took two weeks for the Royal Navy to admit that it was one of their submarines, and six years for damages to finally be paid. The United States Navy has admitted that from 1965 to 1985 there were 628 incidents involving nuclear equipment and two accidents involving weapons. The Soviet Union have had about 200 submarine reactor incidents. There are now five submarines resting at the bottom of the ocean, two American and three Soviet, the most recent Soviet being the one in 1986 off Bermuda, which went down because of a powerful explosion in the tube which housed the nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles. There were 16 nuclear weapons on board, two reactors, and the radioactivity which could be released from those reactors is 20 times that released from Chernobyl, about one billion curies. There is also a Soviet sub lying 140 miles off Land's End which went down in the early seventies and people are not sure what is happening to the radiation coming out from that reactor.

There are 900 nuclear reactors in the world and 500 of those are in the sea. Those at sea have no containment for the reactors, no scrutiny of levels of radiation given off and there are the problems of collision, a crash, or a fire on board. The subs have pressurised water reactors, the type used at Three Mile Island and proven to be unstable, but all the nuclear navies use these reactors. When the reactors are working they release radiation. They use sea water to cool the reactors, drawing this from the Irish Sea and pumping it back, but when they surface or come into port the radioactive ballast water is released. Also there have been shown to be higher than average birth defects in the children of the crewmen on submarines. In Fife, where the submarines are refitted and nuclear waste in the radioactive fuel rods is removed, workers are receiving seven times the maximum dose allowed of radiation and there have been clusters of leukaemias among children living in the area around that submarine base.

The sort of accident envisaged is either that the reactor, the cooling system to the reactors or the nuclear weapons themselves will be damaged by fire. Between 1962 and 1978 there were 700 incidents involving reactors on nuclear powered submarines. When these damaged nuclear submarines limp back to base, if they are leaking radiation it is being leaked into the Irish Sea. The U.S.S. Nathaniel Green which was a floating Three Mile Island with 16 nuclear weapons on it, had to be decommissioned after it was grounded on the sea bed in the Irish Sea. In 1970 a supply ship in Holy Loch caught fire with 16 Polaris missiles on board. In 1983 the U.S.S. Sam Rayburn collided with barrels of dumped nuclear waste 300 miles south of Ireland and sat for three days on the sea bed before having its hull decontaminated. Earlier this year there was a near meltdown of a Polaris missile on H.M.S. Resolution with 10 multiple nuclear warheads of 60 kilotons each on board. There are emergency plans if something does go wrong, but they are hopelessly inadequate. A study by Professor Jackson-Davis of the effects of an accident on a nuclear powered or armed ship showed that in San Francisco Bay there would be tens of thousands of cancers over a 30 year period and the cost of decontamination would be one sixth of the entire Federal Budget of the U.S.A., not counting economic compensation. To cite one of the plans;

in Plymouth, the home port to nuclear powered hunter-killer submarines, there is an Emergency Plan called the Devenport Public Safety Scheme which says, "It is unlikely a health hazard will exist beyond 550 metres from the vessel. Subsequent monitoring after a radioactive cloud has passed may indicate that the evacuation of the general public from certain areas out to one or two kilometres may be advisable." That is just insane, the area will be much vaster. There is already a message to be broadcast by B.B.C Radio and T.V. and Scottish T.V. called Clyde Pub. Safe which says, "We have been asked to make the following urgent announcement. There has been a slight leak in the atomic reactor of a nuclear submarine which is at present resulting in a small release of radioactive products. There is no danger to the general public." Another question is how to dispose of these submarines when they come to the end of their time, dump them off Scotland, off Southern Ireland or look for land-based ways to dump them in Britain. There are at least 10 Polaris and Churchill class submarines at Faslane to be dumped in the 1990s.

In Ireland we are lucky in that we are not in NATO, we do not have a nuclear power plant of any sort, and we do not have any submarines, nuclear or otherwise. The official policy of the Irish Government is that no ships will come in to Irish ports which are nuclear armed, or nuclear powered. The Government told everyone this and then left it to them to fulfill it. There have been around 200 warships coming in to Irish harbours since 1983, six of those were nuclear capable, and one was a nuclear ammunition ship. The U.S.S. Cunningham came into Cork harbour in July amid protests from Greenpeace and C.N.D. Some of the locals in Cork who wanted the ship to come in argued that the visit would amount to £50,000 in revenue for the shop keepers and publicans. They didn't mention that if one of the missiles went up, you could have counted on countless cancer deaths. The ironic thing was that a 15 year old girl from Cork stowed away on this ship, ending up in the United States and her parents are suing the American Government saying that she was lured onto the boat by drugs. The U.S. Department of Defence has said that between 1975 and 1984 over 21,000 U.S. military personnel were removed from nuclear weapon duties for drug or alcohol abuse, and there are some incredible quotes from submarine crews about how boring things get, so it's a real high to be under the Arctic Ocean realising you can blow the world up, and it's an additional high if you are high.

One of the more bizarre visits we had from military vessels was in 1985 during a major NATO exercise called 'Ocean Safari' at which time neutral Ireland was visited by a Dutch minesweeper, a Dutch sub and a Dutch anti-submarine warship, two Canadian destroyers, two American anti-submarine ships, two Soviet Naval Research vessels and two Soviet Union destroyers, including the Rear Admiral of the Soviet Northern Fleet equipped with a military band. The Government has continued to say that we trust these ships not to have weapons on them. Well, we don't trust them so Irish C.N.D. has drafted a nuclear-free zone bill based on the bill in New Zealand, to stop any overflights of planes with nuclear, chemical or biological weapons on board or any visits from ships with nuclear weapons or nuclear powered. Nuclear submarines can go through a country's territorial waters as long as they surface, this is international navigation and called 'the right of innocent passage'. We challenge the entire concept of a nuclear armed or powered ship being 'innocent'. At least on the surface our Government does operate a nuclear-free policy and the fact that the politicians have been very positive towards it makes us think we might be able to achieve something.

WORKSHOPS

All Saturday p.m., and most of Sunday a.m. were devoted to workshops. All were able to choose to go to two different workshops on Saturday, by running two sessions on the most popular topics.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON

1. Irish Concerns - led by Carol Fox and Deirdre Cantwell.

The Problems: leakage from nuclear power stations; discharge from Sellafield and from nuclear submarines; 12,000 military overflights a year; transshipment of nuclear waste; accidents possible in all areas.

Possible solutions

- a) Support for the Republic's neutrality, and the proposed nuclear-free Bill. The Republic, after a plebiscite, agreed to sign the Single European Act - a recent court case to question whether the Act was against neutrality clauses in the Constitution was surprisingly won, to the dismay of most politicians, but to the joy of peace workers. Support for the "Nuclear Free Zone Bill" (now at the Green Paper stage and before the Senate) is important, but CND wants to widen the public information before it reaches the Dail to make it more effective. This would upset NATO and USA, who feel Ireland is a covert member of NATO - radar is provided, and possible use of airports for military planes.
- b) Dockworkers may block nuclear waste shipments into Irish ports.
- c) Fishermen may broadcast submarine positions - thus removing the secrecy of their passage. Dockers and fishermen from Britain support.
- d) The Irish Government may take the British to the European Court over Sellafield. Politicians in North agree in opposing Sellafield.
- e) The Irish Government, media and peace groups united to oppose the Trawsfynydd tests this year.
- f) British peace/ environment workers should be aware of these facts and WILPF should support all initiatives on either side of the Irish Sea towards retention of Irish neutrality.

2. Identifying nuclear clusters - led by Barbara French

This was a case history of 7 childhood leukaemias on the West coast of the Severn, opposite Berkeley and Oldbury power stations, which developed after the 1976 drought. Taken over the much larger Forest of Dean area the Gloucestershire Health Authority said it was average. Local parents and supporters persisted and employed a statistician, and home tutors revealed exactly where the cases were. After 5 years the Chief Health Officer admits "this must be a supercluster which cannot be ignored." The only comparable cluster in the County is where Smiths used to make luminous clocks - closed down because dangerous nuclear waste was found. Advice -Don't be hoodwinked by broad area averages! Be persistent! NB. All the children are still alive.

3. Hinkley Point - Jane Wildblood as leader.

The first group looked at what is happening new in the inquiry into Hinkley 'C' since the Sizewell inquiry:- a) The first since Chernobyl.

- b) USA, which started the PWR design, is no longer building it.
- c) It is being held after the Government has said it will privatise electricity, and there is a question mark over whether privatised firms can or would develop nuclear power with so many hidden costs.
- d) the social effects of developing a kind of power with so much popular opposition and fear. IF HINKLEY IS NOT BUILT OTHERS IN THE PROPOSED "FAMILY" OF NUCLEAR POWER STATIONS WILL NOT BE STARTED.