

*Errol Christie*

### Tireless repair delay fears

There are fears that the repairs to the stricken nuclear submarine HMS Tireless could suffer further delays as neither the actual extent or location of the cracked weld is clear after initial investigations.

It was officially stated earlier this week that films and photographs of the damaged area had been sent to Britain for further study. The cracked weld, in the submarine's coolant system within the nuclear compartment, was originally advised as being only 2 mm, but the crack is now believed to be bigger.

A reassessment of the repair is now on the cards, as the Ministry of defence has confirmed after days of speculation which suggested that the repair work may have to be abandoned. However, the MOD feels that the repairs will be undertaken and that they come within the safety programme.

A safety report prepared by the Gibraltar government's nuclear consultants, on which the government's decision not to oppose the repairs was based, says: "The MOD and their civilian contractors (Rolls Royce Marine Power Ltd who designed the nuclear plant originally) have investigated the exact location and size of the leak. Their combined conclusion is that the leak is due to a small crack (2mm wide) in the weld where the relatively small pipe to the pressuriser is connected to the much larger primary circuit pipework." f1

The report adds that the experts appreciated that the viability of the whole repair plan depends on the remade weld being of high quality. In addition to the possible nuclear safety implications, the experts wanted to assess the possibility of the crack running into the wall of the primary circuit pipework. Since the MOD has no plans in place for dealing with this eventuality, it could cause a significant delay to the overall programme. 1

The report also says that the experts have "identified a small possibility that the MOD has misdiagnosed the location of the crack to be repaired. "This would only be apparent a few weeks into the repair, and could cause about two months delay." However, they add that there should not be "a significant safety risk." (14.10.00)