

# Foulkes calls for Antares details to go to Crown Office

By Eric McKenzie

A CALL for the Crown Office to be given all information on the sinking of the fishing vessel Antares to enable it to decide whether criminal charges should be brought against naval personnel was made yesterday by the Labour MP George Foulkes.

His demand came on the first day of operation of a warning system to alert fishing vessels in the Firth of Clyde of submarine movements in the area. The arrangement was agreed by the naval authorities after the Antares sank with the loss of her four-man crew when it is believed her nets were snagged by the submarine HMS Trenchant.

Inquiries into the tragedy are under way by the navy board and the marine accident branch of the Ministry of Transport. Strathclyde Police have also interviewed crew members of the Trenchant and Clyde fishermen.

Mr Foulkes, MP for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley, stressed he was not prejudging the outcome of the various inquiries, but he was concerned that all the findings of the DoT and navy board inquiries should be handed over to the Crown Office.

He said he had also drawn the attention of the Crown Office to a Scotland on Sunday report which alleged

breaches by the Trenchant's commander-in-charge of four standing regulations at the time of the incident.

Last week Mr Foulkes was told in a written reply to a question to the Scottish Secretary, Ian Lang, that the procurator-fiscal at Kilmarnock was investigating the circumstances of the tragedy and would report to Crown counsel.

Last night, the Kilmarnock fiscal, John McGlennan, said he was already aware of the newspaper article and its allegations would form part of his investigation.

He said the police were already investigating the matter on his behalf and it was likely to be well into the new year before his report was completed. A fatal accident inquiry was likely to be held.

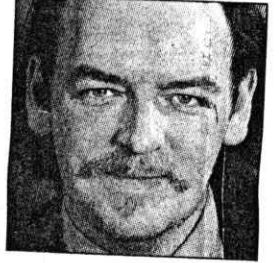
The warning system, involving four-hourly messages on a special radio frequency by the Coastguard, got off to a quiet start yesterday. The Clyde Fishermen's Association secretary, Patrick Stewart, said that fishermen were told there was only one submarine movement in the area, which was in Loch Goil, not a heavy fishing area in the Clyde.

Fishing will stop on Friday for a fortnight

# The deadly fog of secrecy over the Clyde

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SOME TIME this week, if the weather allows, the wreckage of the fishing boat Antares will be raised 500 feet from the Arran Trench in the Firth of Clyde. Whether the body of the fourth seaman who died with her will also be recovered remains to be seen.



Ian Bell

For the sake of the bereaved, one hopes so. The sinking of the Carradale boat by a Royal Navy submarine in what Defence Minister Archie Hamilton at first called a freak tragedy, highlighted the cult of secrecy which rules our bureaucracies. It is not much of a memorial.

It was no accident, at least not in the usual sense of the word. The combination of fishing vessels and submarines in a relatively narrow stretch of water was always lethal. The list of 'incidents' in the area down the years, unexplained and unacknowledged by the navy, is evidence of that.

Last week Mr Hamilton was being congratulated for agreeing that fishermen should be informed of when and where British and US submarines are operating in the Clyde.

The 150 grieving women from the fishing communities who kept silent vigil outside the navy's Faslane base last Thursday night, asking with their placards if their own men would be next to die, did not join the applause.

There is less to Mr Hamilton's concession, coming hard on the heels of his initial, graceless refusal to suspend submarine sailings, than meets the eye. Submarine manoeuvre areas have been marked on sea charts for decades, but that has not safeguarded the fishing fleet. Letting the fishermen in on the 'secret' seems unlikely to improve matters. Equally, the provision of Freefone information services, surface safety patrols and electronic warning devices are all half-measures. They will not reassure the fishermen and their families, who can cope with the unpredictable elements, but know that a submerged submarine presents a different category of risk.

What the people of Carradale and the other fishing ports of the firth want is simple. They can see no reason why submarines leaving Faslane should not travel on the surface until they reach the Atlantic. But that is something the Minister will not countenance.

The reason, of course, is national security, that totem of the British political class. Security from whom? The Cold War is over. The only legitimate question hanging over the navy's operational fleet of 18 nuclear-powered submarines is whether it should continue to exist.

The fishermen also point out that, even if a plausible enemy did appear, the navy's insistence on sub-surface operations in the Clyde would be pointless and dangerous. All submarines in the firth are vulnerable, above or below the water. You do not have to be a master spy to observe them leaving Fas-

lane. Scotland has passively hosted Britain's military machine for decades. Naval and air bases made it a first-strike target through much of the Cold War. Gruinard Island was poisoned by useless experiments with anthrax; rocket-testing ranges pollute the calm of Benbecula; low-flying jets are a potentially lethal nuisance. And while the nuclear submarines in the Clyde age and deteriorate — with no one able to explain how they will be decommissioned — there still is Trident, that hideously expensive folly, to look forward to.

All military activities carry a risk. It seems only a matter of time before low-flying claims civilian lives. But the Faslane submarines are what the military men might call a 'clear and present danger'. Mr Hamilton's concession, welcomed by one myopic newspaper editorial as 'good news', fails to address the problem.

In a way, the Clyde fishermen have succeeded where peace camps and protests failed. It was their threat to blockade Faslane, one suspects, which caused Mr Hamilton to give at least the appearance of taking action. But the Minister's first instinct two weeks ago was typical of Whitehall: admit nothing, concede nothing and, if possible, do nothing.

Military security clearly took priority over civilian safety. There is no reason to believe that has changed.

Such thinking becomes, in time, its own justification. The culture of secrecy exists for its own preservation, even when the ostensible reason — the threat of war — has all but vanished.

Before anyone mentions the Gulf, they should perhaps explain why Britain is contemplating a nuclear strike on Baghdad, or show how Iraq could attack Faslane. As things stand, our nuclear submarines have no function.

Fishing in the Clyde is hard and dangerous. It is also, as the military should be reminded, just as important to a nation at peace as the museum pieces of the Cold War.

An old slogan from the last global conflict said that careless talk costs lives. Military secrecy, preserved during peacetime in the face of all logic, seems equally lethal.

'Who next?' as one of the women's banners at Faslane asked.

*The 150 grieving women from the fishing villages keep a silent vigil and ask, Who is next?*

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