Scottish CND

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Subject: UK subs in trouble

Curtain Call on Nuclear Deterrent Farce

The crack in the main coolant pipe on HMS Tireless could have given way completely, causing a steam explosion in the reactor compartment. The rapid loss of all coolant water could then have triggered a series of events which may well have led to a melt down of the fuel in the reactor.

In November 1997 an exercise, Short Sermon, was carried out at Faslane where the Navy played out this kind of scenario. One of the participants, the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, later wrote describing the consequences of this type of accident as 'Potentially Chernobyl like'.

"After initially trying to downplay the significance of this problem and its implications, the MoD is now admitting to a 'generic' problem in all PWR reactors in hunter-killer submarines," said CND Chair Dave Knight, "which clearly indicates that military requirements have taken precedence over safety."

CND believes that alternative 'protective' arrangements for the Trident ballistic missile submarines has more do with political face-saving than operational necessity. Trident is not likely to be attacked but to admit that it could go out on patrol without 'protection' could be interpreted as admitting that the hunter killer submarines are redundant.

CND is not prepared to accept an MoD statement that such a generic problem could not be detected in the Trident PWRs. They may be modifications on earlier designs but they are subject to the same stress and pressures and should be subject to the same inspection procedures as the hunter killer submarines are currently undergoing.

The curtain should come down on the whole nuclear deterrent farce," said Mr Knight, "unfortunately, the parliamentary shadow-boxing on nuclear weapons issues means that this particular Whitehall farce will run and run."

Meanwhile, Canada has just taken delivery of the first of four modern, diesel-electric submarines built in the 1980s and declared surplus to requirements by the MoD before they were even used. The 'Upholder' class submarines have been renamed by the Canadians who have acquired them in a lease-to-buy arrangement costing $750 million. They languished in the Barrow-in-Furness dock awaiting a purchaser for years.

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