

EXERCISE SHORT SERMON

The nuclear reactor accident exercise held by the Navy 18-20 November was, as Brian Quail stated in the *Helensburgh Advertiser*, 'nothing but a cynical pantomime!'. The exercise was a farce before it started: the Off-site Centre at Rhu, where any emergency would be coordinated from, was set up days in advance, even down to catering tents and Portaloos. The exercise scenario started with a fire aboard *HMS Sovereign* at 9 a.m. on Tuesday. The fire was extinguished, the alarm was sounded, and base personnel calmly went to their shelter stations, to be evacuated building by building. Those workers that had arrived in their own vehicles were escorted to their cars and allowed to leave. Those staying in base accommodation blocks were bused to the Garelochhead Army Camp, in buses that normally would not be in the base during the day.

By 3 p.m., *HMS Sovereign's* reactor had collapsed and radiation was leaking from the submarine. Nuclear Emergency Monitoring Organisation (NEMO) vehicles simulated taking readings from various sites on Garelochside and the peninsula. Disappointingly, NEMO workers didn't join in the spirit of the exercise by wearing protective gear - perhaps they were worried they'd alarm the unsuspecting public.

Volunteers from CND and the Peace Camp monitored activities all day and kept the press informed. The Navy had themselves brought in a hundred journalism students to be the 'press'. Some of them wandered about at will, and came to the Camp for information, though they'd been instructed not to visit the Camp.

Some base personnel volunteered to go to the Victoria Halls and pose as evacuees, for example, OAPs worried about their budgies and mothers worried about their

children at school. Staff from various Council departments were attempting to organize themselves and had to ask the volunteers to stop role-playing while the staff tried to figure out what they were supposed to do. In the evening, CND members met some of the people attending the exercise in a bar in Helensburgh. In the last briefing of the day, they were told that the Navy had tried to seal the hole in the submarine hull by dropping water balloons on it! When that didn't work, the Navy were next planning to bring a warship alongside the stricken submarine and fire high velocity shells into the ballast tanks thus sinking the radiation-spewing sub at its berth! A Community Councillor from Dunoon telephoned MoD Whitehall who confirmed that this was a possible option. The press had a difficult time believing this.

By Wednesday, the base was back to business as usual. The exercise continued on paper at Rhu - at midday the Armed Forces Minister Dr John Reid arrived for lunch, which was served in a non-soundproof tent. This gave CND the opportunity to brief Dr Reid via megaphone on the futility of the exercise, as well as warning him not to eat, drink or breathe in the irradiated atmosphere! People attempted a blockade of the Off-site Centre as Dr Reid left, and one Peace Camp member was arrested.

So what now? On paper, there is now a nuclear-powered submarine, with a ruptured reactor, sitting on the seabed of the Gareloch. Is the Navy still monitoring radiation levels (on paper)? Are Argyll and Bute Council and the Emergency Planning Department still being informed of radiation levels (on paper)? Has

below: sign outside Exercise Control Centre, Rhu, suitably modified. *right:* protest outside the Centre during the visit of the Armed Forces Minister.

Garelochhead been evacuated and where has everyone been re-housed (on paper)? Have signs been put up forbidding fishing, swimming, boating, breathing on Garelochside (on paper)? A three-day exercise cannot even begin to cover the disastrous consequences of a nuclear reactor accident - it's all just very expensive window-dressing.

Write to the Tourist Board and ask whether they think that the Helensburgh area is a safe place to come and

visit when the Navy's emergency plans involve such terrifying options -

Argyll, The Isles, Loch Lomond, Stirling and Trossachs Tourist Board, 41 Dumbarton Road, Stirling FK8 2QQ; Tel 01786 470945 Fax 01786 471301

(incidentally the Chair of the Tourist Board is the Argyll and Bute Councillor who has master-minded the eviction of Faslane Peace Camp!)

Jane Tallents

Britain votes against disarmament

In a recent debate in the House of Commons the foreign office minister Tony Lloyd made a wonderful speech about how the Labour Government was going to press for nuclear disarmament:

"Our approach to multilateral disarmament will not be grudging and it will not be one that plays up the obstacles to progress in order to leave things as they are. We intend to be a constructive actor in the process, using our influence to move things forward where we can."

Fine words, but not to be taken too seriously of course. Only days after this speech the British Government was voting *against* a major proposal for multilateral nuclear disarmament when it came before the United Nations General Assembly.

Over 70 % of the member countries in the UN voted for the resolution which called for talks leading to a convention which would ban nuclear weapons. But this was too much for our New Labour Government to

stomach. Along with the US, France and Russia, they voted against.

The US and Russia proposed a narrower approach which would involve only themselves. Our government supported this narrow view and in doing so revealed their true position. For Tony Blair, *multilateral* disarmament only applies to Russia and the US, it has nothing to do with us.

This government is not rushing to include Trident in international negotiations. At any sign that Trident might be included they are doing all they can to stall and obstruct those nations, the majority at the UN, who want to see genuine progress towards getting rid of these weapons of mass destruction.

The media are all too quick to talk about how other countries are queuing up to build the bomb or covertly trying to produce these dreadful weapons. The reality is most other countries want to see an end to nuclear weapons - and it is our government which is standing in the way of a nuclear free world.