

Thousands evacuated from Faslane

By Paula Batters

But CND brand emergency exercise a 'cynical pantomime'

THOUSANDS of workers were evacuated from Faslane yesterday (Wednesday) in the country's biggest ever nuclear accident exercise.

Operation Short Semon swung into action a day earlier as MoD chiefs prepared to respond to a mock reactor accident in a nuclear submarine.

Base chiefs have hailed the exercise as a big success. But as it drew to a close today (Thursday) CND protesters branded the event 'a pantomime.'

Brian Quail, Joint Secretary of the Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, told the Advertiser: 'This is nothing but a cynical pantomime: a dishonest charade that verges on utter lunacy.'

The three-day exercise follows strict guidelines laid out by the Royal Navy in the Clyde Area Public Safety Scheme. Preparations for the accident, in which one person died began in earnest last week.

But as the disaster scenario got underway on Tuesday morning with a fire raging out of control on Hunter-Killer sub- 'Sovereign', CND campaigners blasted the safety scheme.

One spokesperson said: 'Regardless of how well exercise Short Semon is run, there will always be some fundamental flaws.'

'The Royal Navy refuse to discuss any accident scenario

occurring outside the fixed submarine berths.

'A collision in the Clyde that resulted in a breach of the submarine hull could lead to even larger populations being at risk in areas where little or no emergency plans are in place.'

Mr Andy Moore, Assistant Director of the Nuclear Accident Response Centre in London said: 'We have a detailed plan on the probability of an accident and how to respond.'

'The submarine reactors are very complicated but, in the highly unlikely event that they did fail, we have studied exhaustively ways to contain a leak.'

In the event of a nuclear submarine reactor accident, an emergency broadcast would go out on TV and radio, though this was not the case during exercise Short Semon.

However, a short bulletin did go out over the tannoy's surrounding the base, advising workers to stay in the emergency shelters until further notice.

Radiation detector vans were also visible on the road between the Clyde Off-Site centre in Rinu and the North Gate entrance to Faslane.

As the emergency evacuation scenario went into operation, several bus-loads of workers left under police supervision while others left in private transport.

Local nuclear protesters, Frances Mascarenhas and Eric Wallace from Helensburgh witnessed the evacuation.

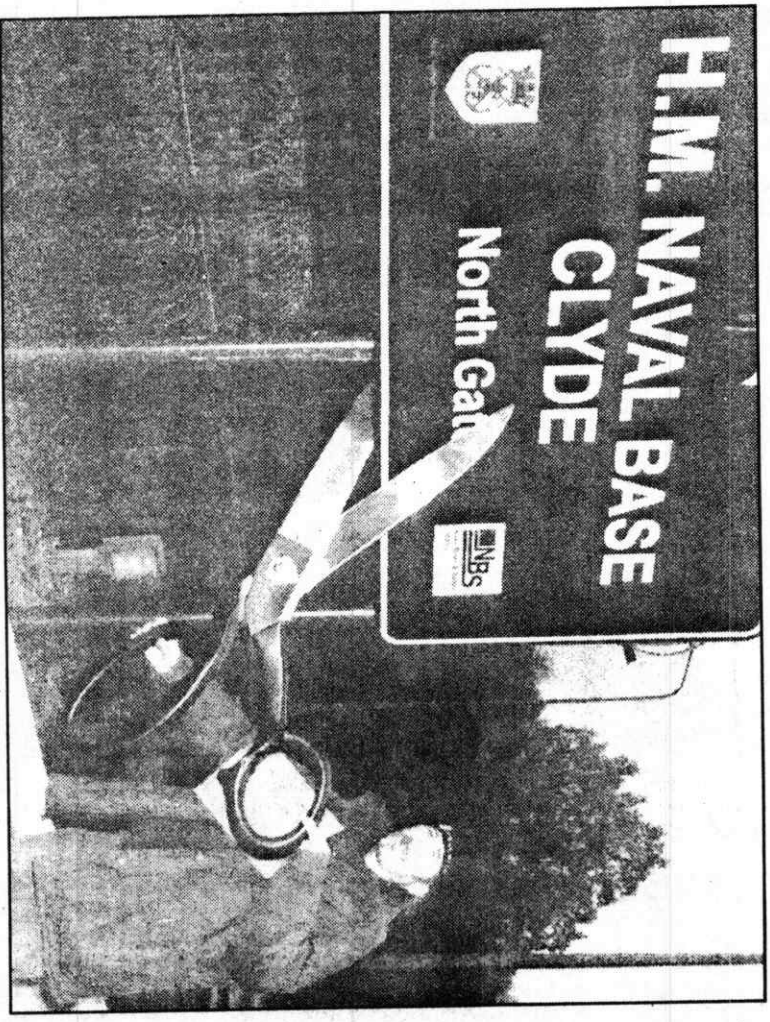
Frances said: 'What really annoys me is that the council object to a few brightly-painted caravans and trees when the base is surrounded by mile upon mile of barbed wire.'

'These are the people whom we have trusted our fate and that of our children.'

Monitored by the Prime Minister and Armed Forces Minister John Reid, who was due to arrive at the base as the Advertiser went to press, Short Semon tested the response of the Navy, Argyl and Bute Council and the accident and emergency services.

A spokesperson from Faslane told the Advertiser: 'The exercise is proving it's worth in the way that all the agencies are working together and integrating their response.'

'There has been some concern that members of the public were not involved but it was felt that it would be too much of



The cutting-edge of campaigning. One CND protester makes his point.

an inconvenience, especially for the elderly and infirm, to go through the evacuation process.

'We have gone through the process as if it were real, not just here but also in London and Edinburgh and everything has gone according to plan.'

Short Semon is expected to finish later today (Thursday).

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