

Chernobyl on Clyde fears of submarine watchers

By MARY CULLEN

A REPORT published this week by Scottish CND and Faslane Peace Camp says the Ministry of Defence is putting submariners' lives at risk by sending defective nuclear submarines out on patrol.

It claims Polaris submarines operating from Faslane have been pushed beyond their normal limits in a confused attempt to cope with a dangerous flaw in their nuclear reactors.

And it offers 29 pages of evidence gleaned from official publications, newspaper reports and close observation of submarine movements in and out of Faslane to support its case.

CND Polaris watchers now believe that the two operational boats out of the original fleet of four — Resolution and Repulse — should be recalled.

HMS Revenge was scrapped last week and Renown has been in refit at Rosyth for over two years.

Dumbarton MP John McFall, a member of the Commons Select Committee on Defence, said no satisfactory explanation has been given as to why Renown has been out of service for so long.

The report, *Cracking Under Pressure, The Response to Defects in British Nuclear Submarines*, says serious reactor problems have been detected for which no tried and tested methods are available.

AND ITS AUTHORS SAY THE TIME HAS COME TO BRING THE BOATS IN BEFORE A "CHERNOBYL-TYPE" ACCIDENT OCCURS IN THE CLYDE.

But the MoD strenuously dismissed claims that unsafe boats are sent out on patrol.

They say safety certificates which allow submarines to go to sea are issued by the independent Nuclear Powered Warship Safety Committee.

An MoD spokesperson added: "The CND report is full of so many inaccuracies that it is not a credible reference document."

WRONG

He said, for example, that HMS Revenge was not scrapped because of defects as the report claims, but because it had reached the end of its operational life and it would not have been cost effective to send it for an expensive refit.

He conceded that much of the report was based on close reading of official documents but said its authors had used the information selectively and drawn the wrong conclusions.

He added: "If all the allegations were true, it would be a devastating document."

At the heart of the CND report is the belief that fractures found in the primary coolant circuit of the nuclear reactors in all four Polaris boats could lead to a major accident.

So serious is the defect that it has taken over two years to repair Renown at Rosyth Naval Dockyard — yet the report says inspection and repair work has been attempted at Faslane in other boats in order to keep them in operation.

The report claims such work will not have been effective because of radiation levels in reactor compartments.

And it adds: "On several occasions, significant reactor defects have only been discovered during the closing stages of a refit. Problems were detected during final power testing on HMS Resolution in 1976, and on HMS Renown at the end of a refit in 1980.

ABANDONED

"There have been cases where serious reactor problems have been detected for which no tried and tested repair methods were available.

"Normal routines have been abandoned in order to maintain one Polaris submarine at sea at all times.

"HMS Resolution spent 20 weeks at sea in a 21 period in 1991. There were serious problems in maintaining power on board HMS Revenge when the submarine was kept in service for nine years instead of seven."

And it concludes: "The MoD can only continue to maintain one Polaris submarine at sea into the mid 1990s by operating HMS Resolution and HMS Repulse for two years beyond their intended decommissioning date.

"In the interests of safety, remedial action should have been carried out at one of the dockyards before any of the older submarines was used.

"These dangerous practices are the result of an overriding operational requirement to keep one Polaris boat at sea at all times.

"There is no longer any strategic rationale to support this practice. The lives of submariners and the safety of the general public are being put at risk to sustain a policy which is now irrelevant."