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# Concern rising over Polaris reactor faults

By MARY CULLEN

SENIOR officials at the Ministry of Defence have admitted that Polaris submarines based at Faslane have developed cracks in their nuclear reactors, it was claimed by Dumbarton MP John McFall this week.

And an independent nuclear consultant has said Polaris may have to be withdrawn before Trident comes into service in the mid-1990s.

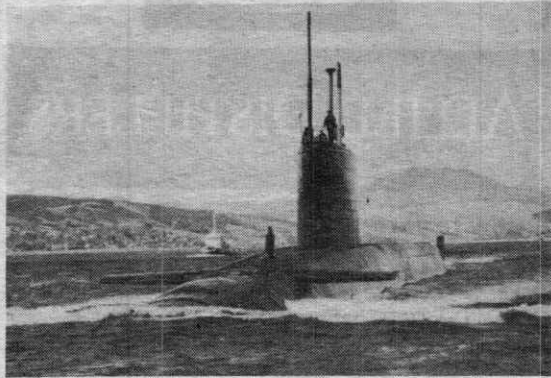
The claims came after Mr McFall obtained evidence of a problem in the vessels' reactors and called for a Defence Select Committee investigation.

Until the weekend the MoD had repeatedly denied that there were any defects in the 20-year-old submarines.

An MoD spokesman told the *Lennox Herald* that a defect had been discovered in a submarine in January and a series of checks was being carried out on all submarines, including Polaris.

But he refused to discuss the condition of Polaris reactors.

Mr McFall, who is a



REPULSE — one of the Polaris fleet.

member of the all party Commons Defence Select Committee, said: "The MoD has changed its public stance on the matter.

"The information I have suggests that serious problems exist in three out of the four Polaris submarines. They are supposed to operate on a rota basis from Faslane with three of them ready to go at any one time.

"It now appears that for much of the past two years we have had only one submarine on patrol."

Mr McFall has called for a public hearing on the

matter and wants assurances about the safety of submariners and refit workers.

The defect in the Polaris boats is said to be identical to one that has already led to the scrapping of three other submarines.

Last week the MoD announced that the nuclear-powered submarines HMS Warspite and HMS Churchill, which do not carry nuclear missiles, are being decommissioned — despite the fact that they have just under-

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## POLARIS REACTOR CLAIMS

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gone £100 million refits.

HMS Conqueror, which sank the *Belgrano*, was scrapped in July.

And two other sister vessels, the *Valiant* and *Courageous*, have been confined to port since last

autumn.

Emergency repairs may be carried out on Polaris submarines to ensure that Britain retains its independent nuclear force at sea.

An MoD spokesman said: "The nuclear

deterrent is being maintained and is expected to be maintained."

But he confirmed that the navy's nuclear warships safety committee would withdraw Polaris submarines' licence to go to sea if they were found to be unsafe.

Independent nuclear engineer John Large, who has been advising Mr McFall, told the *Lennox Herald* that information about the reactor defect has been well known on the technical grapevine for some time.

He said there are "serious operational defects" on the boats and added: "The MoD could be forced to withdraw Polaris before Trident comes on stream."