

SHIPBUILDING, THE NAVY AND LABOURS LITTLE CRISIS

The Labour Party will form the next government, its merely a question of when. What is certain also is that they will be faced with a series of crisis's on a range of policy areas and that one of these will be defence.

The Labour Conference last year committed the party to reducing defence spending. That is going to be very difficult to do, especially since the party leadership are scared of appearing soft on defence.

The major problem the incoming government will face is the fact the current government have made fairly drastic cuts but in a haphazard and short term fashion. They have also put a number of services, such as the maintenance of aircraft, out to private contract which has, in some cases, caused significant damage.

The service which has been hit hardest by this process is the Royal Navy, to a point where it can not perform some of its allotted tasks at all or in some cases without risking the lives of sailors in the process.

There are three main tasks the navy is intended to perform. i) nuclear warfare, ii) defending Britain against invasion iii) protecting economic interests in British waters such as fish stocks and oil interests and iv) helping with the invasion of other peoples countries. On all four counts the Navy is in dreadful disarray.

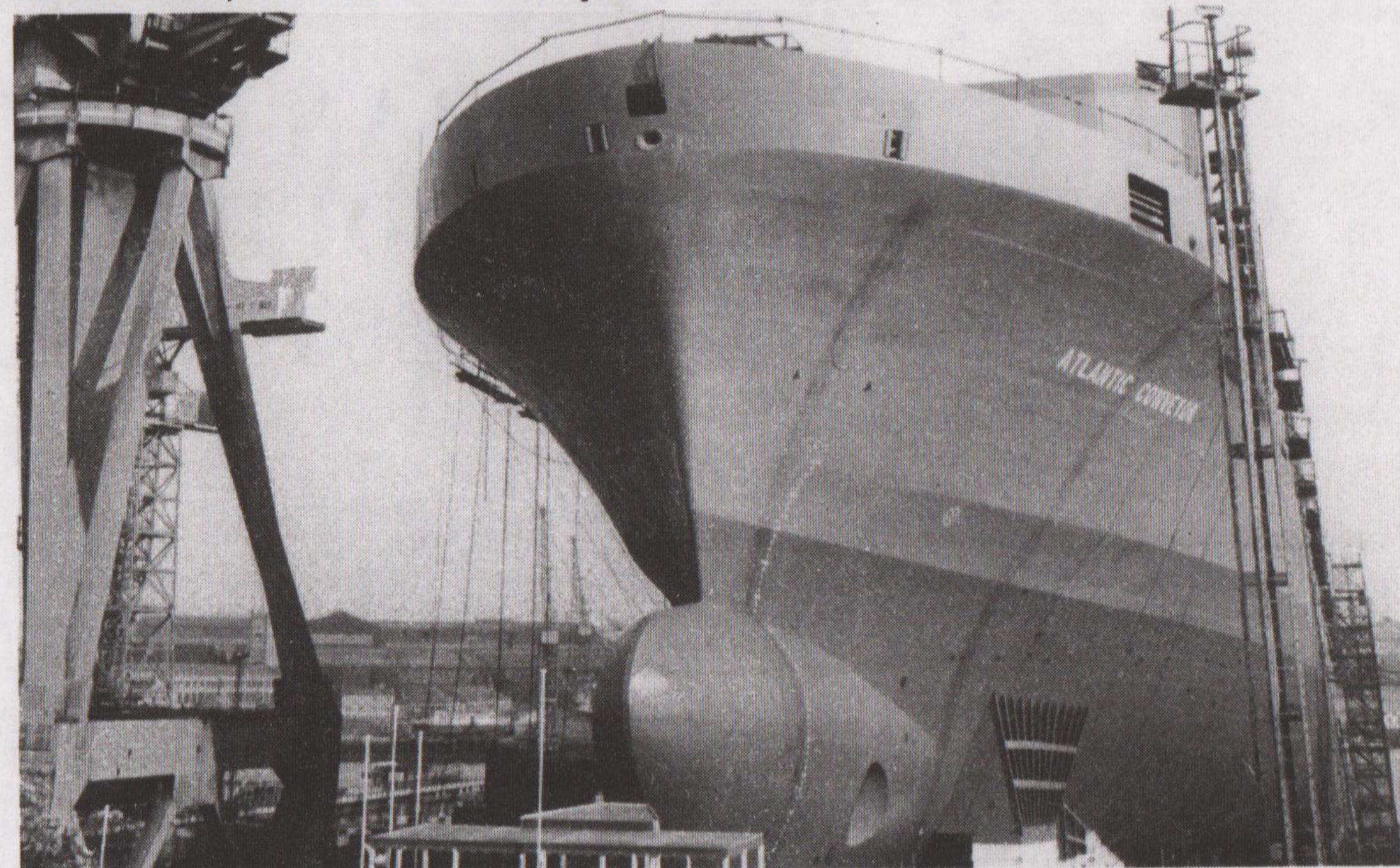
i) Trident is now of symbolic purposes only, it's quite unusable. Submarines can not defend themselves. They depend on not being traceable but technology now means that they can be traced, especially large ones with a lot of heat coming from their engines ie nuclear powered ones. The idea that we should put a nuclear reactor and a number of warheads into a situation where it could be depth-charged is just horrendous. Since most sophisticated military setups include the capacity to track missiles, if they don't have the capacity to trace submarines, means that as soon as one missile is set off they will know where it is. Thus, involving Trident in a conflict would be taking a staggeringly dangerous risk.

If the navy were to have a choice of the type of nuclear weapon they could have, it certainly wouldn't be Trident - it costs an absolute fortune.

ii) This is a bit of joke. No one believes the type of mass invasion witnessed in the Second World War is a serious option anyway, but if it were, there is very little the Royal Navy could do about it, even if it were.

iii) Economic interests are important. Fish are now generally regarded as not just a valuable resource but a vital one if we are to be able to feed ourselves in the next century. This was one of the reasons why Britain fought the Falklands war - but we

have no means of defending these interests. The South Atlantic has now been almost fished out by Far Eastern, Eastern and some West European ships fishing illegally, but there is nothing that the Royal Navy can do about this. We are also simply not in a position to prevent any form attack on oil platforms which is one of the reasons why the South Atlantic oil fields, which were another reason why Britain fought the Falklands war, have not been developed.



This ship was sunk in the Falklands war. Not only are Merchant ships vital to our economy, they are also vital to defence but this government have all but wiped out the merchant fleet

iv) This is normally represented as supporting peace keeping activities, by getting them out to where they are going to keep the peace and by supplying material for them to do so. Every single conflict Britain has been involved in since the Second World War has had this as one of the major features - with the exception of the Berlin blockade.

But the navy's capacity in this area consists of two bigish ships. One of these would probably sink if it put to sea, the other keeps breaking down.

The navy usually depends on merchant ships to provide support for this type of activity but the merchant fleet has been so depleted the navy has to hire ships in from other countries, often registered under flags of convenience - which costs a fortune.

So the Labour Party will need to be looking at re-equipping the navy but before it does it will need a review of foreign policy too. The foreign policy decides what the military will be used for and that decides the type of equipment, the type of troops, their numbers and the type of training they get. That shouldn't take them too long.

What is vitally important is that the trade union movement involves itself in the

debates about the role the armed forces will play. The reason being that there are moral implications to how our forces are used and what they are used to achieve but also there are very substantial industrial implications in what the MOD buy and how they work the procurement process.

One example is, for instance, the sensible thing for the navy to do would be to subsidise the building of Roll on/Roll off

ferries for commercial use so that the navy could commandeer them during times of conflict. Since there have been serious problems in the past with these vessels sinking, research into developing safe versions of such vessels could be a significant boost to the merchant shipbuilding industry in Britain. It would mean that not only was there work to support the yards, that work would help develop the skills and techniques in the industry and the design work could give yards in this country the edge in the technologies associated with this type of vessel. On the other hand if the government get it wrong and plumb for the very expensive type of warship now being developed, even though technology has already made them obsolete, there will be no gain to the industry and the defence budget will continue to be a substantial burden on the economy.

We are at a watershed. There are tremendous opportunities for using the MOD budget to aid the expansion of the manufacturing base in Britain. But that won't happen unless there is a great deal of work done to lobby the government. It is also pretty unlikely so long as the procurement budget has the great fat dead weight of Trident hanging round its neck.

DEPLETED URANIUM AMMUNITION LINK SUGGESTED BETWEEN BIRTH DEFECTS

251 families of Gulf war veterans interviewed in Mississippi reported birth defects in their children born since that war. There is the suggestion that this may have been caused by contact with depleted uranium armour piercing shells.

Uranium is an extremely dense, very hard material. It is in effect a waste product from the manufacture of nuclear weapons and from some process in the nuclear power industry - so it is cheap. The way the shells work is that a rod of this material is fired at the armour plate. It penetrates and, as it passes through the armour, small particles and dust are scraped from the side of the rod. This dust ignites as it enters the armoured vehicle and burns to death the people in it.

There are alternatives to Depleted Uranium, but they are more expensive. However, they are only more expensive if

nothing is done clear up after these shells have been used. The United States also used depleted Uranium as one of the layers in the laminated armour plate they used for their main battle tank, the A1 Abrams. Following the war the US took all the vehicles of this type, which had been damaged or destroyed back to the US. This may have been because they were unwilling to have the vehicles repaired by the Iraqi's, or it may have been from concern over the toxic nature of the exposed Depleted Uranium. The former is the more likely.

Britain's Challenger tanks currently use exclusively Depleted Uranium shells for armour piercing. Some aircraft and helicopter ammunition also uses these shells. So, if there is a link with birth defects, the people who would be affected would be aircraft armourers, tank crews and store keepers.

There is also some evidence that the

remains of these shells on the battlefields of Iraq are affecting the health of children in the area. The reason why children appear to be affected more than others is that they play in the battlefield remains. Since the US used this type of shell extensively in both tank and aircraft ammunition, there are Depleted Uranium rods throughout these battlefields. A link has been suggested between the shells and sickness amongst Iraqi children by a German charity groups working in Iraq, by the name of the International Yellow Cross.

Since the standard practice for the British MOD faced with problems associated with toxic material is to deny everything and try and lie their way out of it, it is unlikely that they will admit anything until such a link is firmly established. However there is work being done in the United States which may well result in the MOD being forced to investigate the problems associated with Depleted Uranium.

DOCKERS DELEGATION REPORT ON REPRESSION IN TURKEY

--- DON'T GO TO TURKEY ON YOUR HOLIDAYS

Liverpool Dockworkers sent a delegation to Turkey recently and their report of the political conditions there makes frightening reading.

The Dockworkers themselves were locked out of Liverpool dock last year. The employers sacked several people in a manner which was out of all proportion to what they were supposed to have done and, when the rest of the workforce protested, the employers sacked everyone else - almost 500 people. This was clearly an attempt to break the union in the docks and introduce the casual labour schemes abandoned 40 years ago. The dockworkers continue to picket the docks and have been sending delegations throughout the world to encourage Dockworkers elsewhere in the world to refuse to handle goods trafficked through Liverpool.

As part of this programme they sent a delegation to Turkey to speak to dockworkers there. What they saw of what is happening to that society horrified them. As a result they are calling on people not to take holidays in Turkey.

For some time now the police death squads have been active and a large number of people have "disappeared" while in police

custody. On the 13th of July the delegation witnessed in the centre of Istanbul a peaceful protest by families of "disappeared" people. The 50 or so protesters were surrounded by armoured cars marksmen and hundreds of riot police. The demonstrators were violently driven from the street.

On the 15th of July the delegation witnessed another protest, made up from women and children relatives of "disappeared" people, being violently attacked by the police. Some of the demonstrators were seen to be being dragged by their hair. In addition a number of journalists covering the event were beaten.

On the 16th of July, one of the delegation Billy Jenkins, attended a rally of 6,000 striking textile workers in the South East of Turkey. 20,000 are on strike for basic trade union rights. The rally was sealed by the police who then attack those attending. A number of batons were broken over peoples heads, the police continuing the attack using bricks. The union leader was arrested together with a number of other union leaders and a journalist.

What the dockers delegation witnessed gives and indication of the depth of the crisis

in Turkey. A crisis created by the same foolish military and economic policies promoted by our own Government.

The only way which this barbaric regime can maintain itself is by brutal repression, including widescale torture and murder.

Turkey is a member of NATO. Britain supplies it with a number of significant pieces of military equipment

Turkey has little in the way of export industries. A very important source of foreign currency, which their Government can then use to fund arms imports, comes from the tourist industry. By holidaying in Turkey, therefore, people are helping fund the repression of the huge bulk of the population by a violent murderous regime - don't do it.

Protest faxes to N Erbakan, Prime Minister - 00 90 312 417 0476

In a surprising development the Textile workers won all of the demands they were making. These included an eight hour day, union recognition, wage increases in line with inflation, national insurance benefits and no victimisation.

BOYCOTT SHELL

BECAUSE SHELL
SUPPORT THE
REPRESSIVE
NIGERIAN
REGIME

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THERE'S BLOOD IN THEIR OIL

ARMS TO DICTATORS IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA A BIG MISTAKE

TUCND received a letter of complaint recently some of which is outlined below. It has been included because it reflects a position of a number of people within the trade union movement and indicates some of the problems, I believe, which arose from the way in which parts of the movement responded to the crisis in the former Yugoslavia.

I have outlined my response to the critique after the quotes. I have dealt with the first point made by the letter last because it is perhaps the most serious of the accusations.

"I read with interest, and some concern, the article on former Yugoslavia contained in the Spring 1996 edition of "TUCND News".

I entirely agree that the presentation of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia has been subject to much distortion and misinformation, some of it deliberate, some of which is no doubt due to the complexities of the situation (although it is not as complex as some observers try to maintain, and I am fed up hearing quasi-racist comments about how the people of the Balkans are inherently incapable of living together).

It is also the case that the general presentation has demonised the Serbs and presented the conflict as a simple one of democratic resistance to Serb aggression - a grotesque distortion.

The article is also correct to point out that the German Government played a crucial and disastrous role in 1991 and 1992, through its encouragement of extreme nationalist forces in Croatia, and its efforts (ultimately successful) to secure recognition of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina as independent states before any settlement had been arrived at in connection with the Serb minorities. Nevertheless, there are a number of aspects of the article which are contradictory, some which are inaccurate and there is a general tone which comes dangerously close to justifying "ethnic cleansing" and the murder of thousands of innocent people.

I refer to just a few of these.

Firstly the whole premise of the article, that the British Trade Union Movement has been drawn into support for a British Government policy of backing Croatian/Bosnian expansionism, is a misreading of the position. The British Government actually opposed the German approach on recognition of Croatia and Bosnian-Herzegovina. Perhaps the most glaring misinterpretation is in the paragraph in the article which refers to a GMB official calling for a lifting of the arms embargo on Bosnia as another example of the British Trade Union Movement being drawn into supporting British Government propaganda. In fact, the foremost advocate of the embargo, to the extent that on the ground throughout Bosnia Herzegovina the British Government is widely seen as pro-Serb.

Secondly the article refers to Tuzla as "a mining area in part of Bosnia with strong links with Croatia". Tuzla is actually in part

of Bosnia with links with many parts of the former Yugoslavia: it is closer to Belgrade than to Zagreb. Of particular relevance, however, is that the Tuzla Municipality is the only one which in the last elections before the disintegration of Yugoslavia, non-ethnically based parties were elected to office, and there has been a determined effort ever since to maintain the multi-ethnic character of the region....From my standpoint efforts to maintain that tradition is eminently worth supporting - particularly when they are being subjected to severe political pressure from the nationalist government in Sarajevo.

Thirdly the article contains an extremely serious allegation about the shell which landed in Tuzla in May 1995....I can only assume that there has been some confusion with the bomb which fell on Sarajevo market place in February 1994 which came from a Bosnian Government position....I really do have to ask that you either supply the information backing up the allegation that they were killed by Bosnian Government soldiers, or retract the allegation.

Fourthly I have never come across the suggestion that "Chetnik" is a racist term. Its origin is actually in the Serbo-Croat word for a "member of a unit". It originally had no pejorative meaning at all, until Mihailovic's forces adopted its use in the battle against the Partisans. Frankly, I think it is far more racist to describe those who carry out and use the term "ethnic cleansing" as Serbs, than it is to call them Chetniks. It is utterly wrong to try to blame the entire Serb people for atrocities carried out by a section of their political and military leadership.

The British Government position:-

What our government were about was to encourage the break up of the former Yugoslavia but to discourage the slide to civil war. However it is clear that the nature of the nationalist governments in both Bosnia and Croatia meant that such a war was almost inevitable. It is certainly true that the Bosnian and Croatian regimes both saw Britain's involvement as being biased towards the Serb regime - there were a number of instances where the British were active in suppressing the worst excesses of their forces. This was, for instance, why British troops were targeted by the Iranian mercenaries fighting for the Bosnian government.

The position in Tuzla:-

The municipal government in Tuzla declared they were in favour of a multi ethnic state and worked hard to make this a reality. The are honourable people who fought politically in very difficult circumstances for a position which ran counter to that promoted by their government. They should be commended and they should be supported with vigour for doing so - but, Tuzla, because of its strategic position and the facilities it offered was used as a base for the large scale busting of the arms embargo. Associated with the stance taken by the municipality was the call for the arms embargo to be lifted and

therefore, support for the political objectives of the nationalist Bosnian and Croatian governments, which were as racist and genocidal as those pursued by the Serb nationalists.

Bosnian Government bombing their own people for propaganda purposes:-

My reference was to the Sarajevo bombing and I think I made that clear. The union journal referred to by my article was vague in its reference and my article said that the bombing was similar to the Sarajevo bombing.

The Bosnian government have been accused of bombing their own civilians for propaganda purposes on a number of occasions. The Italian airplane brought down at Sarajevo airport during the debate over whether to impose a no flight zone on Serbia was fired from a government held area.

The accusations referring to the bombings was made on a number of occasions by Yasuschi Akashi UN Chief Representative and is repeated in a book by one of his US advisers, Susan L Woodward, called Balkan Tragedy (Published by the Brookings Institute). It was also made "off the record" on a number of occasions to a number of reporters by Douglas Hurd. The reference to the forensic investigation was taken from TV reports.

Dangerously close to justifying ethnic cleansing:-

I think I have been accused of this on a number of occasions because I have not been willing to accept that to resolve the conflict the lands pinched by Serbia had to be handed back. That means accepting borders which have been defined by a civil war which involved ethnic cleansing. By equating accepting the borders with the methods used to achieve them in practice means supporting the retaking of that ground by those who ostensibly represent those who were forced to leave. To equate acceptance of the borders with a justification of ethnic cleansing is, I would argue, more a contortion than a distortion.

The difficulty with that position is that every single one of the government bodies in the former Yugoslavia have been involved in ethnic cleansing. By not accepting those borders and by calling for the lifting of the arms embargo on Bosnia in practice meant supporting the Bosnian/Croatian government and not the municipal government of Tuzla.

For instance in March this year four members of the Bosnian government forces were charged with war crimes. One was a unit commander and is charged with rape, murder and various acts of torture. The other three were running a camp and are charged with murder. The nature of these crimes indicates that they were part of a system for which ethnic cleansing was an important goal. Another example is what occurred when the Serb forces left Sarajevo. They left behind a number of, mostly elderly, people in the suburbs formerly held by Serb forces

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OPPOSITION TO SHELL BUILDS

The calls for a boycott of Shell are building up now with a number of unions looking at ways of developing strong campaign. UNISON are distributing posters throughout their union calling for a boycott. The GMB passed a motion at their national conference roundly condemning Shell for their support of the Nigerian regime. The T&GWU are calling for a boycott because of the de-recognition of the trade union at Shell. A number of others are considering what their reaction will be. Very few are not considering some form of action.

The TUC itself appears to be procrastinating over the issue. A number of unions are pushing for some form of action while the TUC office is resisting as hard as it possibly can.

One of the things which has phased unions a little has been the way in which the Nigerian regime have interfered with the Trade Union movement in Nigeria. Following the reassertion of military government in 1993 a number of trade union leaders have been arrested. In a number of unions the government have imposed their nominees on the union as the leadership. The union appears to be the same and links with union abroad have been maintained but the policies and leadership have been imposed by the government.

Considerable efforts are made to create the impression that the trade union movement in Nigeria is content with the political situation and that, as far as they are concerned, everything is as it should be in Nigeria - and for a while a number of people believed them.

The 10th of November will be the anniversary of the hanging of Ken Sarawiva and organisations throughout the world are organising a week of action against Shell as a result. Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and The Body Shop campaigns unit are discussing activities in this country and a number of unions may support this activity.

Continued from previous page

who had elected to stay. As the forces left gangs of hoodlums moved in to terrorise them. Most left soon after. In Sarajevo handing control to the Bosnian Government forces meant ethnic cleansing.

After the peace agreement began being implemented UN forces uncovered a training facility, run by Iranian mercenaries, for Bosnian government secret services personnel. One of the things they were being trained to do was to make landmines look like toys. When you consider the context in which such a device could be used and its effect it is clear that this was a training establishment designed to help destabilise communities and to encourage people to leave certain areas.

That is what we were asked to support

NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND THE FALKLANDS WAR

Normally the government do not confirm or deny when or where nuclear weapons are deployed but during the Falklands war they both confirmed and denied that they were. However, CND has just discovered that not only were they being carried, nuclear weapons were on the HMS Sheffield when it was hit by an Exocet Missile and sunk. This is a profoundly worrying set of circumstances.

John Nott, the defence minister during the Falklands war, said at the time that HMS Sheffield was "sailing under wartime orders and with wartime stocks of weapons". The Sheffield had been involved in a NATO exercise which meant that it would have been carrying nuclear depth charges. Lord Trenchard, the then Minister of State said "there is no question but that nuclear weapons are not applicable to the current situation in the Falklands War". So Knott said they were there and Trenchard said they weren't.

It is difficult to imagine a more dangerous set of circumstances than a ship carrying nuclear weapons being attacked in this way. The warheads the Sheffield was carrying are referred to as WE177B which were a version developed to be used as a depthcharge, intended for use against submarines. They are old, relatively unsophisticated and vulnerable. Had the Exocet hit that section of the ship which housed the depthcharge there would be a strong possibility of a nuclear explosion. That would have not only destroyed the Sheffield but a number of other vessels in the immediate area and possibly some of the land forces on the Falklands. That Thatchers government risked such a thing is not simply insane, its criminally insane.

The possibility of ships being deployed for wartime activities directly from an exercise should have been predicted. The vulnerability of such a bomb and the hazards associated with having them involved in conflicts such as the Falklands are clear. The situation was predictable and demonstrates that nuclear weapons should never be deployed in this way.

The other thing which this event demonstrates is that nuclear weapons are

with the call to lift the arms embargo on Bosnia.

I believe we should look for the conditions which would allow the rebuilding of that country and the rebuilding of progressive politics there. It is clear to me that it was only after the fighting had stopped that the political processes could begin to be developed for overcoming racism and nationalism inherent in all those party to the conflict. War may well be the result of process occurring thousands of miles away but peace depends on what happens within the communities involved. After the war stopped building the peace is what we in the trade union movement should be seeking to support.

Jimmy Barnes

wholly inappropriate to the type of situation that people like Thatcher get this country into. There are strong rumours that submarines carrying nuclear missiles were also diverted south to the Falklands war, but it is clear that they simply could not have been used.

The only bombs and missiles Britain had at the time were designed to obliterate cities. The theory was that Britain could threaten to obliterate the Russian population by destroying her cities were we attacked by Russian missiles.

Long range nuclear capable bombers were used against Argentina. Since no significant military purpose could be gained from such an exercise and since it was clear that Britain was not in a position to bomb the mainland from long range bombers on anything other than a sporadic basis this was clearly a threat that we would use the free-fall bomb version of the WE177. Thatcher and her ministers were in practice saying to Argentina that there would come a point where we would use nuclear bombs against Argentinean cities. The Argentinean military took no notice of this so the threat clearly didn't work.

Had Thatcher gone ahead and used them the international reaction would have been massive and the reaction in Britain would have been dramatic. She would very probably lost the war, very probably been forced to pay reparations to Argentina on a scale which could have ruined our economy and been hard pushed to avoid being charged with war crimes.

What that situation proves is that nuclear weapons could not be used to any political or military advantage in conflicts such as the Falklands war. But it also proves that carrying these ridiculous totems of a long gone military might is itself staggeringly dangerous.

The information, confirming what CND has argued for some time, that the Sheffield was carrying nuclear depth charges, was revealed in a document issued by the International Atomic Energy Authority, which listed the HMS Sheffield as carrying nuclear bombs amongst other "Accidents and Losses at Sea involving Radioactive Material".

Apparently the navy had to retrieve the nuclear weapons in secret, from the wreck of the Sheffield. That is a feat in itself and certainly a testament to the bravery and skill of those involved. Its a tragedy, however, that such skill should be wasted because of the incredible foolishness of our government.

This situation also demonstrates that there are other hazards associated with Britain defence deployment. Britain has concentrated heavily on nuclear powered submarines. Argentina had a submarine attacked and destroyed during the Falklands war. Since Argentina had an anti-submarine capacity herself, had she destroyed one of our nuclear powered submarines, the results could have been catastrophic. Part of the reasons for Britain fighting the Falklands war was because of the valuable fish stocks