



Welsh choir



A submarine blocks the gate to AWE Burghfield
(Pic. Zoe Broughton)

LAST week, people from Ceredigion joined others from all over Wales at the Atomic Weapons Establishment near Burghfield to protest against Trident and its replacement.

Last Wednesday (Jun 15), far-flung groups from Aberystwyth, Swansea, Knighton, Cardiff, Newport Gwent, Rhyl and Bangor came together to blockade the 225-acre site near Reading in Berkshire where Trident missiles are assembled and maintained.

At the main entrance to the base, Côr Cochion Caerdydd and Côr Gobaith from Aberystwyth led a singathon from 7.30 in the morning throughout the day. Although a number of attempts were made, a large civilian and Ministry of Defence (MoD) police presence prevented protesters from blockading the main entrance to the site on Mearings Road.

Protesters did succeed in blocking the so-called 'construction gate' to AWE Burghfield, however. A large submarine was positioned in front of this gate and remained there for much of the morning before being removed by the MoD. Protesters sang a version of the famous Beatles' 'Yellow Submarine' to accompany their own Trident replacement.

When removed, the submarine's place was taken by placards, banners and a symbolic red-line of cloth

is indefensible.

"We must learn better ways to solve and prevent conflict. We need to learn the lessons of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. So, I will stand and sing and dance with others in defiance of their hideous weapons and so-called security systems."

TACKLING TRIDENT

The Trident missile system comprises four nuclear-powered Vanguard submarines, Trident D-5 ballistic missiles and the warheads. Each submarine is armed with up to 16 missiles, each of which can carry at least three warheads. And each single warhead has an explosive power eight times that of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945. That bomb, 'Little Boy', devastated an area of five square miles and killed at least 140,000 people. Many others suffered long-term sickness and disability.

The UK always has one armed Vanguard submarine at sea and by the measure of Hiroshima, its 'payload' has the potential to kill some fifty-four million people - the entire population of South Africa.

MAD

Proponents of the Trident system and its replacement claim it is a deterrent. The military theory of

people in the aggressor state would also be killed.

Trident can also be used as a first strike weapon, though successive UK governments consistently downplay that fact. Critics argue that the system is wholly unsuitable to a contemporary security situation increasingly defined by stateless groups and individual acts of terrorism. Nuclear deterrence, that say, is strategically obsolete.

At the gate of AWE Burghfield, Jan Jones of Swansea CND told the Herald: "Nobody has ever successfully explained to me what nuclear weapons are for: You can't use them, they cost a fortune, and if our real enemies are terrorists, where would we aim our nuclear weapons?"

Questioning the morality of MAD, Professor Rebecca Kay of the University of Glasgow asks how, if 'we' were subject to a nuclear attack, "it would better to die knowing that 'our' bombs were killing those people too?"

The moral philosopher Mary Midgely highlights the indiscriminate nature of nuclear weapons, likening them to landmines on a vastly greater scale.

"This feature cannot be sanitised by claiming that their owners are never going to use them. To say nothing of the fact that they have actually once already been used in combat, the mere act of threatening others

sings 'Trident Out!'



Combined choirs sing out against Trident

life of Trident missiles extended in a programme in close conjunction with the United States. AWE is poised to play a major role when the warheads themselves need to be refurbished or replaced in the mid-2020s.

Some opponents of Trident replacement claim that work on the infrastructure needed has already begun at AWE and that missiles are already being refurbished. If such claims are true, then the UK government is cynically flouting the democratic process.

According to the UK government's estimate, the Vanguard replacement programme will cost £31 billion. Various other credible estimates are in circulation, all of them higher. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament put the figure at a whopping £205 billion. That sum, they calculate, would be sufficient to build 120 new hospitals or pay the tuition fees for 8 million students.

nuclear disarmament movement which has been struggling for nuclear disarmament since the first use of nuclear weapons at Hiroshima and Nagasaki 71 years ago. Trident Ploughshares activists have pledged to disarm the UK's Trident nuclear weapons system in a non-violent, open, peaceful, safe and fully accountable manner. Over 200 Trident Ploughshares activists have signed a pledge to prevent what they consider to be nuclear crime.

Ironically, the UK is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). When that treaty came into force in 1970, it was one of only five states that had nuclear weapons. The other nuclear states were the United States, Russia, China and France. Since then, these five have been joined by India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea. Signing the NPT supposedly commits the UK to nuclear disarmament. Trident Ploughshares believe it is long gone time that the

Still breathless from struggling with police in an attempt to block the Mearings access road, Brian Jones from Swansea, Vice Chair of CND Cymru, told the Herald: "Every time British politicians say 'we need nuclear weapons for our defence', then politicians from every other country in the world can say exactly the same. That's the way nuclear weapons spread. The only sane way forward is to ban all nuclear weapons worldwide, just as chemical and biological weapons have been banned."

The thinking behind the month of action at AWE Burghfield is that only public awareness and resistance can stop the UK parliament voting to permit the UK Government to replace the Trident system. Trident Ploughshares observes that the government claims that the UK is short of money and so is imposing austerity, cutting billions from public spending on health care, education, welfare and services.

Austerity, the campaign observes, is devastating people's lives.

Apart from the moral and strategic arguments against nuclear deterrence, Trident Ploughshares question the economic justice of spending money on replacing the Vanguard submarines, whether it be £31 billion or £205 billion. The campaign calls on groups fighting austerity to join them in taking action and demanding that this enormous sum of money is used for the welfare of the public.

BACK IN WALES



Protestors attempt to block the road

the north end of the Mearings.

"More protests are planned and there will be a large finale on the last day of June. I hope loads more people will create havoc by pinning large red Xs on as much of the fence as they can reach."

Ceredigion MP Mark Williams told The Herald: "The Liberal Democrats and I are strongly opposed to the like-for-like replacement of the Trident nuclear programme. At a time of huge budget cuts which are hitting some of the most vulnerable in our society, we should not be giving credence to the idea of spending over £100 billion over its lifetime for a weapon which simply does not reflect our military needs in the modern world. Trident is an outdated relic of the Cold War, and

the Government needs to recognise that the world, and Britain's military needs, are very different than they were 30 years ago."

With the result of the EU referendum in the balance as the Herald goes to press, we wonder what a Brexit would mean for Trident and the systems replacement. Were Scotland again to push for independence following such a result, would pressure fall on Wales to provide an alternative to Faslane as a base for the Vanguard submarines and their terrible deadly cargo?

Though he withdrew his offer in 2015, earlier First Minister Carwyn Jones had famously said that, if it was forced to leave the Clyde, the missile system would be 'more than welcome' in Milford Haven.

