

SOME MORE UNTRUTHS FROM MoD

Following the disclosure this week by Yorkshire TV's *First Tuesday* programme of the cancer and leukaemia risks to people living near nuclear weapons manufacturing and servicing areas, **DUNCAN CAMPBELL** and **MIKE BURKE** explore official complacency about safety

EARLIER THIS AUTUMN, a Gallup opinion poll found that less than 20 per cent of the population trusted either government or the nuclear authorities over safeguarding or disposing of radioactive waste. This public distrust is unlikely to have been diminished by the smug television performance by Defence Minister Lord Trefgarne.

Trefgarne had been advised to reassure TV viewers in exceptionally general terms. As a result, many of his statements can be shown to be palpably untrue.

This week's controversy focused not on civil nuclear power stations, but on installations primarily built to manufacture and maintain Britain's nuclear weapons systems. These include the early Magnox nuclear reactors, not covered by international nuclear inspection arrangements, and located at Calder Hall in Cumbria, adjacent to the Sellafield reprocessing centre, and at Chapelcross, near Dumfries. Both are in effect operating as plutonium factories, working flat out on a special nuclear fuel cycle in order to produce the maximum amount of military weapons-grade plutonium for Trident missile warheads.

At Sellafield itself, a Special Nuclear Materials group, housed in Building B209, recovers weapons-grade plutonium from nuclear fuel rods. The material is collected in Building B267, and then sent, as ingot-like 'billets', to Aldermaston, the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment. There, the billets are machined and then sent on to the final assembly site for British nuclear weapons, the Burghfield Royal Ordnance Factory near Reading. Other components reach Burghfield from another nuclear Ordnance factory in Cardiff, which handles uranium and beryllium metals, also used in the cores of nuclear weapons. From a newly built plant at the Chapelcross reactor site comes tritium, a form of hydrogen with the property of 'boosting' the yield of a basic atomic bomb.

Three major naval nuclear sites also discharge radioactivity into the environment. At Faslane, Rosyth and Devonport, liquid radioactive waste from nuclear submarine operations and refitting is discharged directly into the sea.

Lord Trefgarne said on Tuesday that:

ADMIRALTY RADIATION RECORDS CENTRE

SHIP/EST/UNIT NPD HMD ROSYTH YEAR 1972
OCCUPIER/HEAD OF ESTABLISHMENT M. O. D. (NAVY)
LAGGER 34

NAME	RECORD OF CUMULATIVE DOSES IN MILLIREMS FOR X RAYS GAMMA RAYS & NEUTRONS				SPECIAL ENTRIES
	AGE LESS THAN 18	18-24	25-34	35-44	
THIS QUARTER	095	404	2607	24289	LIMITS EXCEEDED
YTD	100	3000			

This copy from 1972 of a Rosyth naval dockyard fitter's radiation record shows that, instead of the 'maximum permissible dose for this quarter' of 404 millirems of radiation, he received almost seven times that amount (2607)

We are not in any way complacent . . . whether in submarines or in research establishments we've never had an accident — which has affected the health of people working there.

Trefgarne's assertion follows a long tradition of similar official claims. In 1980, an MoD pamphlet promoting cruise missiles claimed: 'Nuclear weapons have been stored in this country for many years. There has never been any accident or radiation leakage.' In fact there was a major accident involving the burning and destruction of nuclear weapons at the US base at Lakenheath in July 1956.

This week's claim would be news to colleagues of Mr Douglas Whittaker, who early in December 1957, became the first of many casualties at Aldermaston. A pipe to a smelting furnace broke in front of him and Whittaker was caught in a stream of molten lithium, then being tested for use in hydrogen bombs. Whittaker died in hospital two days later.

Also at Aldermaston, 13 workers have suffered significant plutonium contamination to their lungs, four from plutonium elsewhere. By 1982, four Aldermaston workers had died of cancer. Five widows are now suing the MoD, and more than 61 other workers are contemplating legal action. There have also been five recent cases of cancer at Burghfield and, in 1983, a major accident.

The intense secrecy about operations at Burghfield has undermined health precautions. One woman recently developed a severe allergic face swelling from chemicals used to make styrofoam, the special packing used to hold the critical parts of the bomb's fission core in place. Although the chemical concerned is, in fact, commonly used in the plastics industry, the Ministry of Defence at first asserted that it was a major defence secret and refused to provide a sample to the Royal Berkshire Hospital in Reading. Eventually a sample was taken there under MoD police escort and the woman paid £1,000 in compensation for her suffering, including temporary blindness.

In 1983, an assembly worker accidentally ignited the fuel of a small decoy rocket used in the Chevaline warhead. On this occasion, remarkably, no one was hurt — although the building concerned was considerably damaged by fire. After this incident, all the witnesses were assembled and ordered 'never to breath a word' of what they had seen.

OF ALDERMASTON itself, Trefgarne had this to say:

We can be confident that what we — what goes on there is done to the best possible [safety] standards

It is not so — and never has been so. The original Aldermaston 'A1' plutonium manufacturing buildings became badly contaminated and were closed in 1978. A new complex, A90, is now under construction at the heart of the plant. Despite its failings, the A1 building was reopened in 1982 under the pressure to produce plutonium for Chevaline.

From these operations about a million gallons a year of plutonium contaminated liquid, processed to extract a sludge, is pumped into the Thames at Pangbourne. We have the official and secret programme specification for the A90 complex, which states bluntly that the currently operating waste treatment plant 'does not comply with current safety standards'. But Lord Trefgarne remained happy:

I'm told that if you drink a pint of the effluent that goes into those rivers — in radioactivity terms at least — it's no more dangerous than a pint of mineral water purchased over the counter of your local supermarket.

The interviewer, unhappily, did not have a pint of Pangbourne water to offer the minister, nor was he invited to explain why there are a pair of signs at Pangbourne, which ask 'the public . . . not to moor, anchor, or bathe between these signs'.

There are also 61 chimneys discharging air from radioactive areas at Aldermaston. In five of these stacks, a 1978 report revealed, the radiation monitors had been installed the wrong way round and were measuring only the radiation in the open air *outside* the chimney.

In fact, the main weapons activity at Aldermaston — plutonium machining — does not itself require that any radioactive effluent be discharged at all. Trevor Brown, who resigned from heading the Aldermaston industrial chemistry staff in May 1981, says that there is 'no need for any effluent to be put out from Aldermaston'. Such a policy might cost money, but would not in fact threaten Aldermaston's main activities.

THE DEFENCE MINISTER was also questioned on Tuesday about the Rosyth naval dockyard. He affirmed that:

We go to endless lengths to ensure that the risks to the workforce and indeed to the people living round is no greater than to anyone else . . .

The risks in or around Rosyth are greater than to 'anyone else', because there is more radioactivity in the working and local environments. Both caesium (a nuclear reactor decay product) and cobalt 60 (which accumulates in the water cooling system of submarine reactors) have accumulated on the foreshore near the dockyard.

The Ministry of Defence may not be concerned. But other government departments are. The Scottish Development Department (SDD) has been complaining for at least four years, according to two confidential Navy memoranda obtained in the course of our investigation.

One memorandum, dated May 1982, states that the dockyard general manager had been receiving 'further complaints' from the SDD about the 'radiologically unsatisfactory effluent drain from the Health Physics Laundry'. The Laundry cleans and processes contaminated materials used by workers refurbishing submarine nuclear power reactors, generating 600,000 gallons of radioactive effluent annually.

The documents reveal a growing problem of the buildup of radioactivity in the sediment of the West Tip due to effluent. The drain outlet was — and remains — accidentally buried, as the radiation danger was noticed too late to do anything about it. According to another internal Rosyth memorandum dated January 1982, 'the effluent is being discharged into the West Tip rather than direct to the River Forth as agreed by the Scottish Development Department, (our emphasis).

The solution to the problem — a new drainage system — has been on the table since at least 1980. But that improvement project has been 'held in abeyance pending a decision on Trident requirements' at the dockyard. Work could not be stopped to allow safety changes to be made because this would jeopardise the SSBN (nuclear missile submarine) refit. An interim solution of removing the effluent by tanker instead of dumping it was proposed, but was not followed up.

The Defence Ministry is divided about whether this matters. Lord Trefgarne took the view that:

There is no evidence to suggest these discharges are having any kind of the effects you are describing and I think people can therefore continue to live in the areas around Rosyth in perfect confidence.

This is not the view of the Ministry's official spokesperson at Rosyth, Tony Warner, who told us this week that there 'had been difficulties' with the West Tip and that the pipeline from the Health Physics Laundry had indeed been discharging 'fluids containing low levels of radiation into the West Tip since 1979 . . . it was recognised that this is something that should not be happening'. The 'difficulties' encountered 'were about to be rectified' and 'a new system is being constructed now'.

WORKERS AT ROSYTH may have been interested in another ministerial explanation this week:

We have very strict criteria for the radiation limits to which workers can be exposed and all of these are religiously adhered to, at Rosyth and elsewhere.

Leaving aside current Conservative views of

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established religion, submarine fitters and other workers at Rosyth have repeatedly been exposed to excess dosages of radiation during the 1970s. We have obtained a selection of five such quarterly records from the Admiralty Radiation Records Centre, which show that some workers have received over seven times the permitted dose.

Any increase in radiation dose increases the risk of cancer for the person exposed, as a special 1977 study of chromosome damage to the cells of Rosyth submarine fitters showed. Professor John Evans, who carried out the survey, found evidence of a linear relationship between chromosome damage and radiation exposure.

The Independent Broadcasting Authority, on first seeing the Yorkshire TV film ten days ago threatened to ban it. Then the IBA insisted that British Nuclear Fuels and the Minister of Defence should be allowed to 'control' their contributions. YTV was asked to remove Lord Trefgarne's closing words, which were presumably considered inappropriate — given the evidence presented. But for the IBA, Lord Trefgarne would have closed thus:

I think I can do no more than point to our record in more than 20 years of this kind of activity . . . we will make sure we maintain that record . . .

Quite so.

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Additional research: Patrick Forbes and Rob Edwards

TROTS

THE LIFE & TIMES OF COMRADE H

ROBIN BLICK and DAVID CALDWELL recall their days as WRP members and liken the party and its leader to mediaeval millennial movements

'ROBOTS, GLASSY-EYED and mindless, programmed as soldiers in this vast fund-raising army with no goals or ideals except as followers of the half-baked ravings of Moon . . .'*

This description of the 'Moonies', or the Unification Church, is uncannily applicable to the Workers Revolutionary Party, Britain's biggest Trotskyist organisation outside the Labour Party.

The WRP is in a state of turmoil after a volcanic sequence of internecine denunciations, recriminations and expulsions. On 19 October its leader for 30 years, 73-year-old Gerry Healy, was expelled by a group led by his long-time henchmen, brothers Michael and Tony Banda, in a purge that made headlines in the tabloid press. 'Red in the Bed'; 'Randy Red Supremo Grabbed My Wife'; 'Our Sex Nightmares By Red Gerry Girls'.

*Daily Mail quoted in *The Making of a Moonie*. Eileen Barker, Oxford 1984.



Self-punishment and purification have always been key elements in self-contained cults

But the story of the WRP's present travails isn't just another tabloid 'sex scandal' spiced with a twist of politics. In many respects the WRP shouldn't be treated as a secular political movement but as one in the tradition of the millennial movements of the Early Modern Age, along with contemporary religious cults like the Moonies and the 'People's Temple' of Jim Jones, whose followers committed mass suicide in Guyana.

Like the WRP, these movements were invariably organised around a cult figure. Always charismatic and radiating a distinct 'presence', the cult figure discharged important functions: the enforcement of discipline, supreme arbitration in matters of doctrine and inspiration of the will both to suffer and to conquer.

The WRP exists in tight separation from the real world and provides a vacuum-sealed life, with its own momentum. Much of the average activist's time and energy is devoted to an endless round of fund-raising for various 'monthly funds' and 'emergency appeals'.

When not gathering finance, the party member engages in proselytizing and spreading the revolutionary 'Word' either verbally or through the sale of assorted literature. Lures, in the form of discotheques, social outings, football teams and the promise of political education are held out to would-be recruits, especially 'the youth', with which the WRP has an obsession.

As in cults like the Moonies, none of these activities would be possible without regular and intense sessions of introduction.

Intimidation was at its most suffocating during the summer camps held by the party before it acquired its Education Centre in Derbyshire. These camps were organised in Sussex during the 1960s and, later, on the Blackwater estuary in Essex.

Cordoned off from the outside world with a rope fence, at night the tents and marquees were bathed in floodlight and were heavily guarded by patrols with pick-axe handles and torches, more concerned to prevent escapes than intrusions. States of siege were frequently generated by Healy to raise artificially the level of tension. These circumstances were always linked to some alleged threat from the Devil without: 'police

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