Bart Libaut of Greenpeace Belgium gave an overview of nuclear weapons storage sites in Europe to the workshop on ‘Making Europe nuclear-weapons-free’ at the conference of the European Network for Peace and Human Rights, which met in the European Parliament in Brussels on 20/21 October 2005. We reproduce one of his slides here. More slides and reports of this and other workshops at the conference are available online (www.russfound.org).

There are 480 US tactical nuclear weapons based in Europe. They are all of type B61 and are kept at bases at Kleine Brogel (Belgium), Volkel (Netherlands), Büchel and Ramstein (Germany), Aviano and Ghedi Torre (Italy), Incirlik (Turkey), and Lakenheath (England). Three other sites are in ‘caretaker’ status, while unused vaults at nuclear storage sites could accommodate up to 336 extra weapons. These weapons have a variable yield.

The United Kingdom has 264 nuclear weapons. These are deployed on submarines based at Faslane. The nuclear weapons are stored at Coulport. Nuclear weapon research and production takes place at Aldermaston and Burghfield. Each nuclear submarine can carry up to 48 nuclear warheads, launched on US-owned missiles.

France has 348 nuclear weapons. These are based on nuclear submarines, as well as air to surface missiles and bomber aircraft. France is the only country that still deploys nuclear weapons on an aircraft carrier. There are 10 or 11 sites directly related to nuclear weapons, including deployment, research, development, construction and laboratory test sites. Civilian and military nuclear research are often closely related.
Robin Cook died suddenly on 6 August 2005. Roy Hattersley wrote of his recollections of Mr Cook’s speeches on nuclear disarmament during the 1970s. Ken Coates sent this letter to The Guardian in response.

Dear Sir,

As we get older our memories tend to slip. That is why I sympathise with Roy Hattersley, in his recollections of Robin Cook. But I could not recall a stirring speech by Robin on nuclear disarmament in 1977 at the Labour Party Conference, so I looked it up. It was not made. Neither was it made in 1978. A bit of reference to nuclear disarmament and the iniquities of Polaris was made in 1979 in Robin’s speech in support of a proposal ‘that the National Executive Committee’ (after appropriate consultation) ‘would take the final decision as to the contents of the Labour Party General Election Manifesto’. But this was surely not the robust statement which had impressed Jim Callaghan.

Indeed, Callaghan was no longer the Leader when Robin Cook did make his first extensive speech on nuclear disarmament, in 1980. By that time Michael Foot was the Party Leader, and Robin Cook had been one of a six-person committee appointed to draw up the Appeal for European Nuclear Disarmament, launched in 1980. This is Robin Cook’s speech to the 1980 Labour Party Conference. It owes something to Edward Thompson’s powerful pamphlet, *Protest and Survive*, but it is none the worse for that.

Robin Cook, MP (ex-officio, Edinburgh Central):

‘Comrade Chairman, comrades, I come to this rostrum to ask this Conference to give us a clear commitment to oppose the nuclear arms race. I will not bandy words with Bill Rodgers as to whether his position or my position will be the better electoral asset. I cannot think of a more frivolous position on which to make up our mind on the central issue facing mankind. But I will say this to Bill. Bill, I do not believe we have a hope of convincing the people in the streets, in the factories, in the pubs so long as they see us hedging and fudging our opposition to nuclear arms. That is why we need a clear position. We need it also because we are confronted by a Tory government that has a clear position, a clear position to forcing the arms race. Of course they do not say that is what they are doing; they disguise it. They are even concealing from the British public the full horror of nuclear war. They have prepared for each of you a booklet on survival, telling you how to pull through. It will be all right as long as you crawl into the cupboard under the stairs, just so long as you remember to fill some bags with sand in which you can hide your head. I possess a circular to local authorities in which it solemnly advises chief executives: “Remember in the post attack period schools, libraries and parks will not be operating as in more normal times.”

Yet it is the same people who write that complacent pap who tell us that we are irresponsible, that we refuse to face reality. Do not imagine that if you buckle under and say “All right, OK, we will buy Trident. We will stand still while you pin Cruise missiles all over us”. Do not imagine the military will lift up their hands and say “At last you deter. You are secure. What a relief.” It will not be like that. It will only be a matter of time
before the generals are back with some even more appalling invention, before Francis Pym is telling you you must buy it because it is essential to deterrence, before Peter Jenkins is covering the central pages of *The Guardian* with his wretched sophistries, telling you it is a step towards peace. We have been going on like this for decades and it has got to stop, not after we have got Trident, not after we have got Cruise missiles in every lay-by. It has got to stop now.

Then we are told “Well, we don’t really want you to agree to Cruise missiles so we can have them; we want you to agree to Cruise missiles so that we can talk to the Russians about how to get rid of them once again”. Is there a delegate in this hall who believes that that is the strategy of Margaret Thatcher’s Government? I believe in multilateral disarmament; Composite 45 is in favour of multilateral disarmament, but we have got to look at the record. We have had multilateral negotiations for 20 years and there has been no disarmament. Oh yes, there are differences. Twenty years ago they could blow up the world once, now they can do it 10, 20 times over. Who is going to go naked into the chamber in those circumstances? Yet they have the nerve to say “Give us one more bargaining chip and this time we will do it”. We would have to be the most dewy-eyed romantics to fall for that line once again.

Comrades, Margaret Thatcher has put the choice between arms race or disarmament at the centre of British politics. We cannot with honour walk away from that challenge. I ask Conference to accept the challenge and choose disarmament under Labour, not rearmament under the Tories.’

Roy Hattersley remembers Callaghan as saying: ‘A man called Cook has made a very bad speech’. Then he corrected himself. ‘In one sense it was a very good speech. But it was bad for us.’

Yours sincerely,

Ken Coates

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