

Nationalism and religion dominate platform at Scottish antiwar protest

Our reporters

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Around 2,000 people marched through Glasgow city centre on February 24 in an antiwar demonstration centred on protesting Prime Minister Tony Blair's plan to upgrade the existing Trident nuclear missile and to offer Britain as a base for the US "Son of Star Wars" Missile Defence Initiative (MDI).

In December last year Blair announced plans to spend tens of billions of pounds to replace the Trident nuclear weapons programme, based on the Clyde River at Faslane, Scotland, with a new generation of nuclear weapons.

The previous day some 45 protesters were arrested on the Arctic Sunrise Greenpeace ship as they protested at the Faslane naval base. Ministry of Defence police boarded the ship with battering rams, before making the arrests.

The focus on Trident was, on the part of the march organisers, a deliberate attempt to lend the protest a nationalist colouration.

The march was called under the slogan "Bin the Bomb" and was organised by an umbrella coalition group, Scotland's for Peace. Scotland's for Peace is comprised of church groups, the Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Scottish Trades Union Congress and the Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Nuclear Disarmament. The march was also prominently supported by the pro-independence Scottish National Party, whose leader Alex Salmond spoke from the platform. Other speakers included CND vice-president Bruce Kent, Labour MP Katy Clark and Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) Tommy Sheridan, the leader of Solidarity—Scotland's Socialist Movement group.

Some of the demonstrators carried placards and chanted slogans opposing the war in Iraq and demanding that there be no invasion of Iran. In contrast, hardly any of the speakers so much as made a

reference to the growing danger of a US-led war against Iran.

Speakers from the churches were given pride of place on the platform. They congratulated the unity shown by a platform consisting of the churches, different political parties, peace groups and trade unions and stated that the case against nuclear weapons was an issue of morals. Cardinal Keith O'Brien, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of St. Andrews and Edinburgh, said that Trident was "immoral" and added, "Over a year ago we said, 'make poverty history.' Now we are saying, 'make Trident history.' Make nuclear war history. That is what is uniting so many people today."

The moderator of the general assembly of the Church of Scotland, Reverend Alan McDonald, said that nuclear weapons were "theologically wrong" and that this had been the position of his church for 25 years.

Dr. Richard McCready, the secretary of the Roman Catholic group Justice and Peace Scotland, added. "In the run-up to the vote in the House of Commons in March, I would urge everyone who is concerned about the possibility of renewing weapons of mass destruction to contact their MP."

Speaker after speaker followed suit and proclaimed that the question of the struggle against nuclear weapons and war was one of a matter of personal conscience and electoral pressure. To this end the platform was united in calling on those assembled to ensure that their local Members of Parliament voted against the replacement of Trident in the debate on the issue in Westminster next month. This campaign was also extended to making a demand that the people of Scotland should only vote for MSPs in the forthcoming elections in May on the basis that they also refuse to support Trident's replacement.

Chris Ballance, a Scottish Green Party speaker, said,

“The majority of people in Scotland oppose nuclear weapons. When Westminster votes on the issue, Labour MPs should remember that they represent the Scottish people and are not elected to simply nod through Tony Blair’s policies.”

The platform welcomed the comments of speaker Katy Clark, a Labour MP, who said she intended to vote against the government in the Trident debate. Clark said that the Trident vote would be the “biggest Parliamentary rebellion since the war against Iraq,” but that the government would still win the vote due to support from the Conservative Party.

Her comments were echoed by Labour Party MSP Malcolm Chisholm, who said it was important that “ordinary Labour Party members” were willing to oppose the leadership on the issue of Trident nuclear weapons. He also called on pressure to be exerted on the Labour Party leadership and that the Labour Party “needed to modernise its thinking” on the issue.

Bruce Kent portrayed the question of opposition to nuclear weapons as a national issue to be resolved by the people of Scotland. Speaking of the antiwar demonstration being held in London at the same time, Kent said, “They are having a little demonstration in Trafalgar Square today. But this is the important demonstration, as you have the nuclear weapons up the road.”

Tommy Sheridan said of Trident that there was “nothing independent about the independent deterrent” as the instructions to use the Trident missiles, as well as the order to use it, will come from America. He added, “We want out of that relationship” with America. Sheridan also called on those at the demonstration to only vote for those Scottish MSPs who were opposed to Trident nuclear weapons in the upcoming local elections in May.

A *World Socialist Web Site* reporting team met Daresh Nahar, a teacher, during the antiwar protest in Glasgow. He said, “The US wants to run the whole world and dictate to the world. It’s all financially driven—if they’ve got money, they’ve got power. If they’ve got nuclear weapons, they’ll use that to their advantage as well. All countries should be disarmed, not just some.

“The battle is still on, just like it was in the First and Second World Wars. Their tactics have changed, but their motives are similar to before.

“When they get caught out, they just lie about it and deny things. They have lost all morals and ethics. If the rest of the world disagrees with them, they just veto the rest of the world.

“Unity is the only way to stop the war. All of the countries should get up and say to the US and Britain, ‘You have got to stop now.’ It’s become a global problem now, and it needs to be solved globally. If we can organise on an international scale, we can get millions involved, not just a few thousand like the demonstration today.

“We have to replace all the politicians that have supported the war. We have to replace them with people who aren’t going to change and accept backhanders, people who stand up for principles. I believe it can be done. I am a socialist, like you.”



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