

# Tens of thousands attend London protest against nuclear weapons

Robert Stevens  
29 February 2016

Several tens of thousands demonstrated in London Saturday in opposition to the planned renewal of the UK Trident nuclear missile system.

The protest was called by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). A parliamentary vote on renewing Trident, which is housed on four submarines located in Scotland, is to be held later this year.

Demonstrators assembled in Marble Arch, then marched to Trafalgar Square.

The keynote speaker on the platform was Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn. But he was joined by Scottish National Party leader Nicola Sturgeon, Plaid Cymru (Party of Wales) leader Leanne Wood and Green Party MP Caroline Lucas. This was the first time since Corbyn was elected that the “progressive alliance” of the four pro-capitalist parties, urged by the nationalists and Greens during the 2014 general election, has taken shape—but only with Corbyn acting against his party’s official stance.

Also speaking was Kate Hudson, the General Secretary of Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Tariq Ali, the bourgeois commentator and leading Pabloite, and the actress and former member of the Workers Revolutionary Party Vanessa Redgrave.

In his speech, Corbyn made no mention of the advanced preparation for war being conducted by the United States and the European imperialist powers, including Britain. After stating, “If a nuclear war took place, there would be mass destruction on both sides of the conflict,” he called on the ruling elite to see sense:

“We live in a world where so many things are possible. Where peace is possible in so many places. You don’t achieve peace by planning for war ... and not respecting ... human rights.”

Neither did he mention the unprecedented intervention by an unnamed “serving British general,”

just eight days after his election as labour leader last September, who told the *Sunday Times* that if Corbyn came to power, “There would be mass resignations at all levels and you would face the very real prospect of an event which would effectively be a mutiny.”

In November, these threats by the military were stepped up, as the Conservative government, in alliance with senior Labourites, pressed for war against Syria. That month, Chief of the Defence Staff Sir Nicholas Houghton, asked by the BBC’s Andrew Marr about Corbyn’s statement that he would never authorise the use of nuclear weapons, replied, “Well, it would worry me if that thought was translated into power.” Houghton had earlier told the media that the UK was “letting down” its allies by not participating in bombing missions in Syria.

Redgrave described the occasion, along with the birth of her children, as the “best day of my life.” She presented an entirely moral case against Trident, stating, “Leaders who choose nuclear weapons and close down maternity wards and paediatric units, Accident and Emergency [wards], have chosen death over life.”

She concluded, “I’m so proud to be with you all today and with Jeremy, Nicola, the [trade] unions, everybody else.”

In January Corbyn, a lifelong opponent of nuclear weapons, told the BBC’s *Andrew Marr Show* that a defence review he has called was looking at a compromise in which Trident could be replaced, but that the submarines “don’t have to have nuclear warheads on them.”

Corbyn coupled this ludicrous proposal with a deliberate playing down of the escalating threat of a war between nuclear powers, adding, “I think the nuclear weapons system is something of the cold war

generation. I don't believe that in the insecurities of today, nuclear weapons are a solution."

The majority of the Labour leadership, who Corbyn has refused to oppose on any issue of principle since he was elected leader, support the renewal of Trident. After Corbyn's BBC appearance John Woodcock, the MP for Barrow in Furness, where the Vanguard submarine fleet is built, said, "Having a deterrent that has no capacity to deter is like having an army with broken rifles and no ammunition."

Following Corbyn's appearance on the CND demonstration, Michael Dugher, the right-wing Labourite who was part of Corbyn's first shadow cabinet until being removed in a reshuffle last month, said, "I've nothing against old friends getting together at the weekend for a nice walk. But for Jeremy to share a platform with many of Labour's political opponents and denounce what is still Labour Party policy is quite frankly barmy."

The most important political intervention from within Labour's ranks in support of Trident came in the lead up to Saturday's demonstration by the Labour Deputy Leader Tom Watson. Speaking to the Engineering Employers Federation in London this week, Watson vowed to work with the Cameron government to get the £41 billion renewal of Trident through parliament. He said, "I'm in favour of a continuous at sea nuclear deterrent. My party's policy favours a continuous at sea nuclear deterrent."

He added, "You may have read that this view is not shared by all our MPs. But I have made it clear to [Prime Minister] David Cameron that if he honours his promise of a vote on Trident I will support it."

In a statement summing up the right-wing militarist agenda Labour continues to uphold under Corbyn, Watson concluded, "There are enough Labour MPs to guarantee that the vote is won. I know the PM is currently preoccupied with the European Referendum, but I happen to believe that the sooner this vote is tabled, the greater certainty we can give to industry, our allies and our enemies, that British Industry will deliver the Trident project in good time."

Alongside Watson, another senior Labour leader demanding the renewal of Trident is Hilary Benn, who at the time, acting as Corbyn's Foreign Secretary, was one of 66 Labour MPs who voted for war in Syria, after being given carte blanche to do so, when Corbyn

allowed a free vote on the issue. Speaking at Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, earlier this month Benn stated, "The deterrent is intended to deter and I think it has succeeded in doing that."

The position of the trade union bureaucracy is at one with the Labour leadership. Previously the union leaders had largely presented their support for Trident on the basis that it would cost thousands of jobs if the nuclear weapons programme was scrapped.

In recent weeks, the pretence of supporting Trident on the basis of defending jobs has been married to open support of nuclear weapons as vital to the "national interest." In his speech Watson said, "Our trade unions that represent the thousands of workers in the 450 companies who form the supply chain that make it are in favour of Trident."

Gary Smith, the secretary of the GMB Scotland trade union, said of Corbyn and his supporters, "They want to cancel the renewal of Trident, whatever the consequences." Describing them as "armchair generals," Smith said the GMB would "give these professional posers [sic] the fight of their lives." He warned, "Failing to renew Trident is wrong on so many levels. Whether the professional posers with their brand of student politics accept it or not the people of this country do believe Trident makes us more secure."



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**