

The Guardian: Apologist for nuclear war

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Last week, Britain's parliament voted 472-117 to renew the Trident nuclear submarine programme.

Amid jeering and abuse heaped by members of the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) on their leader Jeremy Corbyn, 140 Labour MPs voted with the Conservatives in defence of Britain's "nuclear deterrent." The Trident vote revealed that there is a single party of war, cutting across party lines.

The media campaign surrounding the vote exposed the central aim of the attempted coup against Corbyn. Its aim is to install the Blairite forces who will ensure Labour continues to serve as the direct and pliant instrument of British imperialism.

As with every aspect of this campaign, the *Guardian* has played a key role.

On the eve of the vote, it provided a platform for Labour MPs demanding support for Trident, as well as those calling for an abstention—reserving its vitriol for Corbyn's anti-nuclear stance.

The first of these sorties was launched by Labour's deputy leader, Tom Watson. He spoke for the vast majority of PLP members in a July 17 article headlined, "Economically and militarily, we must renew Trident."

Emphasising Labour's history as a party of war, Watson declared, "[N]ow is not the time to step away from our historic role as a nuclear power. When [Labour Prime Minister Clement] Attlee built Britain's bomb, he did so because he knew our role in the world would be shaped by our capacity to defend ourselves and our allies; the logic of that Labour party position holds even truer today."

He made clear the predatory interests behind the Trident debate, calling on Britain to step up its involvement in the NATO build-up against Russia: "I am pleased that the UK is committed to deploying our troops as part of NATO's Baltic forces. Putin's Russia looms, a mafia state built on chauvinism. Britain must play its part in holding it at bay."

Labour MPs Clive Lewis and Emily Thornberry, who are nominally Corbyn supporters, contributed their own article, "This Trident vote is a contemptible trick. That's why we are abstaining."

Justifying their refusal to oppose the government motion, the pair wrote that Monday's debate would be nothing more than "a political game ... There is nothing new in this debate—a vote in principle was agreed in 2007. It is being held simply to sow

further divisions inside the Labour party."

To portray the vote on Britain's nuclear program as merely a cynical political manoeuvre by the Tories is politically criminal. Both MPs are well aware of the context in which the Trident vote is being held—a growing arms race by all the major imperialist powers that threatens a third world war. Thornberry is heading up Labour's Defence Review, while Lewis, a graduate from Sandhurst military academy who served in Afghanistan, is currently Labour's shadow defence minister. Both are privy to high-level military briefings, especially in relation to the current NATO build-up against Russia.

While claiming to offer a third way between outright rejection and acceptance of the government's motion, they made clear that any concerns they have over the Trident programme are of a militarist character. Budget outlays on Trident "will matter if our already highly stretched conventional defence capabilities must be cut to pay for it," Lewis and Thornberry wrote. "If we choose to retain a nuclear capability, there are many cheaper alternatives than building the full complement of replacement submarines."

The next day, just hours before the Trident debate, *Guardian* commissioning editor Archie Bland weighed in with an extraordinary opinion piece: "Banging on about Trident—it's Corbynism to a T."

Bland's objective was to portray Corbyn's planned opposition to Trident as irrelevant, because the issue lacked "salience" with the broader public.

"Do you prefer your potatoes mashed or roasted?" he asked his readers. "Which are better, cats or dogs? Is it reasonable for your aunt's next-door neighbours to play loud music after 11pm? If pressed, you will have a view about all of these things. ... But a view isn't usually the same thing as a deep concern. Political scientists call this salience: the idea that, as well as what you think about something, it is worth asking whether you think about it."

According to Bland, the attitude of millions of people to the danger of nuclear war is on par with the minor inconvenience of rowdy neighbours.

"They don't care whether Jeremy Corbyn is leader of the Labour party," he continued. "They no longer care about the invasion of Iraq, which remains a shibboleth for a huge segment of Labour activists, even though it began more than a decade ago and all of the key players have departed from the

stage. And they certainly don't care about the particulars of Trident."

The Tories would "breeze through" the vote on Trident "in a spirit of complete unity," he concluded, while "Labour appears hopelessly divided on something that most people don't care about."

Bland's article provoked hundreds of objections on the *Guardian's* comment thread.

Undeterred, *Guardian* journalist Owen Jones took up Bland's theme in his own column the next day, concluding: "Those of us who believe Britain could set an example by disposing of its nuclear weapons should have the humility to accept we have not convinced the majority of people in this country, including those whose jobs currently depend on Trident and who have not been persuaded about an alternative economic plan. We have to at least start from there."

The picture painted by Bland and Jones of an apathetic populace is an outright lie. Their aim is to delegitimise opposition to Trident—and to block any challenge to the imperialist war drive.

When Bland writes that the public "no longer cares about the invasion of Iraq" he is confusing the indifference of his fellow columnists, such as Jones, who speak for the most privileged layers of the upper middle class, with the egalitarian and oppositional sentiments of millions of workers and young people.

A critical aspect of the *Guardian's* coverage is its determination to downplay the threat of nuclear war. But Prime Minister Theresa May's unprecedented and ominous declaration, made in the Trident debate, that she would not hesitate to authorise a nuclear strike killing 100,000 innocent men, women and children, shows what is at stake.

Her chilling admission was passed over in silence by Labour MPs and the *Guardian* duly stepped in to cover their tracks. The result was a comment by Giles Fraser, "Theresa May is lying over Trident. At least I hope she is."

Fraser, a former canon chancellor of St. Paul's Cathedral, and therefore in the professional business of granting benedictions, claimed that "parliament has just committed well over £100bn on a weapons system that we won't use, that we mustn't use, and that even the Russians know we won't use. They know this because the only situation in which we would think about pressing the button would be precisely the situation in which there was no longer any point in pressing the button."

His imaginary schema was based on the premise that the British ruling class would not *initiate* a nuclear attack. In his entire column, the words Hiroshima and Nagasaki do not appear. But the bombs dropped on both Japanese cities in August 1945, killing over 200,000 people, were nuclear first strikes by the United States. Declassified papers made public in 2013 revealed that British wartime Prime Minister Winston Churchill personally endorsed these atrocities.

On February 15, 2003, more than 1 million people in the UK

joined global protests to oppose the impending invasion of Iraq—the largest anti-war protests in history. This opposition has not gone away. According to a YouGov poll published last June, opposition to the Iraq War has in fact increased over the past 13 years. Polls conducted over the past decade have also consistently registered majority opposition to Trident.

The *Guardian* is not merely a newspaper. It is an organising centre of the nominally liberal bourgeoisie. Claiming to stand for progressive opinion, its role is to police public discourse, upholding at all times the strategic imperatives of imperialism.

The problem is not apathy, as the *Guardian* claims, but the absence of a revolutionary leadership, programme and perspective. The instinctive opposition of working people has been deliberately confined to the parties and institutions of capitalism—the very system responsible for war, austerity and the growing assault on democratic rights.

In 2003, the Stop the War Coalition—led by figures such as Tony Benn, Ken Livingstone, Tariq Ali and Jeremy Corbyn—channelled mass protests behind impotent appeals to the Labour Party, the United Nations and imperialist powers such as France and Germany, to oppose the US-led invasion of Iraq. Corbyn addressed the mass rally in London's Hyde Park, calling on Blair to hold a parliamentary vote on the war. Blair did so four weeks later. A pro-war vote by Labour and the Tories resulted, with British military action commencing the next day.

Corbyn's record since becoming Labour leader in September 2015 has been one of abject capitulation to the Blairite warmongers on every critical issue. In the name of "party unity" he has: (1) refused to challenge Labour policy on Trident at the party's National Conference; (2) allowed a free vote on British military action in Syria that resulted in bombing raids; and (3) opposed war crimes charges against Tony Blair and his accomplices, helping to sweep the findings of the Chilcot inquiry into the Iraq War under the mat.

Despite addressing rallies of thousands of supporters over the weekend, including a campaign launch in Salford on Saturday, Corbyn made no mention of Trident or the threat of war.



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