

## **Unite Biennial Policy Conference 2018**

### **Executive Statement #1: Defence and Defence Diversification**

Unite forms part of the broad labour movement, both in Britain and Ireland, and internationally. The core values of that movement have always included working for world peace and disarmament, "beating swords into ploughshares".

Unite is however a trade union, and as such the first claim on its priorities is ALWAYS the protection and advancement of its members interests at work. This includes of course the preservation of our members' jobs in a fast-changing and unstable economic environment, and the protection of the communities in which they live. Unite does not and never will advocate or support any course of public policy which will put at risk those jobs or communities. This is part of the basic promise of trade unions to its members, and it applies to all Unite members without exception or discrimination.

These principles informed our earlier decision to support the union's successful campaign for a successor programme to replace our Vanguard submarine fleet. It is also informing our political and industrial campaigning for a replacement Combat Aircraft to succeed Typhoon, support for our world class rotary, radar, weapons and control systems innovation and our demands that the scheduled procurement of naval ships, including the proposed three Fleet Support Ships, is limited to UK bids.

It is vital that the design, engineering and manufacturing - including the procurement of British Steel and other core supplies in the manufacture of these vessels is supporting UK industry, further safeguarding tens of thousands of highly skilled jobs, irreplaceable knowledge and the wider communities that support them. Unite recognises the contribution made by our defence industries to the wider UK economy, the thousands of unionised jobs across sectors of our union that rely upon them, and its strategic role in the development alongside other core sectors such as Automotive, Metals, Chemicals and Finance, in the successful implementation of a comprehensive industrial strategy.

Further Unite recognises the on-going failure of government to recognise the central role of public procurement in supporting UK core industries. In particular, the specific refusal of the MOD and Treasury to recognise the social and economic benefits of investing tax payer's money here in the UK, nor the far-reaching costs of its current policy to support procurement of our defence equipment requirements 'off the shelf' - predominantly from the USA - where by 2020 we will see 25% of the UK's defence budget spent. Unite will continue to build upon our 'Defend our Spend' strategy, pressing for the UK defence budget to be spent in domestic factories, recognising the 36% tax return on every pound invested here and the 1.35 times average multiplier effect from this spend in the supply chain and wider community.

A long-term failure of government to develop a UK Defence Industrial Strategy has led to the loss of tens of thousands of highly skilled jobs over past decades. This fact presents particularly sharp difficulties for Unite, and Labour more generally, in significant part because of the failure of successive governments of both parties to grapple with the issue of defence diversification in the post-Cold War world. It is only our members in the sector who have devoted significant time and energy to develop and promote diversification initiatives. We condemn the last labour government for having wound up the Defence Diversification Agency, and the subsequent Tory or Tory-led administrations for their inertia on the issue.

We welcome the labour Party commitment to developing a UK Defence Strategy and, in particular, the renewed focus Jeremy Corbyn has placed on defence diversification, in the context of the priority he rightly places on world disarmament. Given changing threats and the deployment of our armed services to tackle contemporary threats, including; cyber and terrorism while conducting global operations in support of humanitarian relief, defence diversification must be an urgent priority for the next Labour government and Unite will campaign to ensure that it is. Nevertheless,

it is a fact that defence diversification is not going to be taken seriously by the present government, and we cannot ask our members in the affected industries to buy a pig in a poke. The possibility of new jobs of similar quality tomorrow will not support workers and their families and communities today.

Unite congratulates our shop stewards who work tirelessly to mitigate the threats from redundancy and plant closure across our defence sector with thoughtful proposals for skilled alternative work when jobs can no longer be sustained through defence work alone. We commit to building upon that work and to resource a strategic campaign, including the establishment of a cross-sectoral defence diversification combine, building an alliance of affected workers both within and outside of our union to develop an integrated approach to diversification - as part of a wider industrial strategy to defend and enhance highly skilled jobs in manufacturing and logistical support for generations to come;

There is also, of course, a compelling moral argument against the use of nuclear weapons which needs little elaboration as well as the UK's commitment to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. But neither is there a moral case for a trade union accepting the obliteration of thousands of its members' jobs and the communities in which they live being turned into ghost towns; The consequences would reverberate throughout the manufacturing sector and wider afield in logistical support, transport and facilities management across the economy.

For Unite to support such a proposal would inevitably divide our union at a time when its unity and strength has never been more important in both the industrial and political fields. Conference recognises that such unity cannot be overstated as it will deliver for all our members in each of our sectors, and any fracturing of that unity will be deeply detrimental. Unite remains opposed in principle to the possession or deployment of nuclear weapons but our first duty remains to our members, therefore until there is a government in office ready, willing and able to give cast-iron guarantees on the security of skilled defence and associated employment, our priority must and will be to defend and secure our members' jobs. Unite commits to provide resources for campaigning at every level to secure a serious government approach to defence diversification, including the reinstatement of a Defence Diversification Agency, and urges the Labour Party to give the highest priority to this on taking office.