

Why I'm opposed to Trident

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Hi I'm Kate Taylor, and as of last weekend I am the South West Representative on the Young Labour National Committee.

And last year I was elected as the youngest ever councillor in Plymouth, at the age of 18, representing the ward of Devonport.

In the Ministry of Defence's blind panic as to what to do with Trident if Scotland goes independent, they decided to look into whether locating Trident in my ward was a good idea.

Is it a good idea to keep nuclear weapons in a city of a quarter of a million people?

Apparently not.

The MOD report found that if they were to relocate Britain's weapons of mass destruction to Devonport, and there was a nuclear accident, their worst case scenario was that 11,000 people would be killed by radiation poisoning - the entire electorate of my ward and a bit more - and there would be additional casualties from the blast. Windows across a quarter of Plymouth would be blown out. It would leave the city uninhabitable for hundreds of years.

So when my Council colleagues say I have to be careful or cautious about opposing Trident or wars given my ward, to me the opposite is true. When we're dealing with the lunacy of having Trident in major cities, it should be easy to oppose it. I quite like the voters of Devonport, particularly the 1,309 who voted for me, and I certainly don't want them killed by radiation or flying glass.

And if these weapons are too dangerous for Plymouth, then they're too dangerous for Faslane and Milford Haven or for any other community the MOD would want to inflict them on.

And these dangers to the civilian population are just from an accident with Trident, nevermind the use of nuclear weapons in conflict.

This week there has been a conference in Oslo to discuss the humanitarian impact of the use of nuclear weapons, which I don't think the government even bothered to send a minister to.

Preparing for this speech I watched a video on YouTube put together by International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War on the humanitarian consequences of a nuclear war. The impact of even a small scale nuclear war would have effects, not only for the area immediately effected, but for all of us - fundamentally altering the global climate, spewing radiation into the atmosphere, cutting the world's average temperature, reducing rainfall, shortening the growing season, cutting crop production and on and on. Everyone really should look it up.

The ethical and humanitarian case against nuclear weapons is absolutely overwhelming, the consequences of their use are unimaginable. And now, for Britain, the economic case is equally as compelling.

The idea that members of Labour's frontbench can say with a straight face that we need to take difficult financial decisions, face up to "tough" cuts to welfare, freezing public sector pay and not committing to overturn a single cut, whilst saying that committing to spending billions on Trident is essential is obscene.

To me, the NHS is essential. The welfare state is essential. Support for the disabled, free higher education, affordable housing, having enough money to heat your home and eat - those things are essential. Weapons of mass destruction - Trident - is not.

Growing up as a young carer, I'd far rather the next Labour government invested £100 billion in creating a National Care Service to help families like mine, so that we wouldn't have to worry about the cost of care for my grandad. So that as our population ages we have a universal system of care, free at the point of need, so that no-one need live out the last years of their life in poverty or sell their home because of their care needs.

I'd far rather the next Labour government used a fraction of the money from scrapping Trident to pledge to reintroduce EMA, or even better a full living grant, so that teenagers from families like mine can afford to do a levels and not feel any different to any of their peers, not be tied up in a part time job that stops them studying or socialising, that means they can go out and have fun just like their friends.

Ken Livingstone has pointed out numerous times that with the money spent on Blair's wars in the Middle East, which left a million Iraqis dead, we could have kept university education free.

Instead we left the door open for the Tories, so that now I pay £9,000 a year for my degree. Scrapping Trident could easily allow us to reintroduce free higher education.

Together we could probably think up a million things we'd rather see money spent on than weapons of mass destruction.

Scrapping Trident isn't a "tough" decision, it's common sense and I urge the next Labour government to abolish these weapons, before they abolish us.