

Resolution Date: 12th January 2016

Resolution Title: Trident and Defence Diversification

This Branch notes that our union is proud to stand as an influential leader in Britain's trade union movement and be a standard bearer of the struggle for peace and international disarmament. Our vision is of a world where wealth and labour are devoted to exclusively peaceful purposes, and where war is superseded by the control of disputes through international law and the United Nations. We therefore stand opposed to the renewal of our nuclear arsenal including the replacement of Trident.

Britain faces a budget crisis and public spending cuts are high on the political agenda of the new Tory government. The moral and internationalist case for peace and disarmament is reinforced by economic necessities. It cannot be right to spend large sums on weapons of mass destruction when essential services are facing cuts.

This makes the question of diversifying British manufacturing industry away from its over-reliance on defence spending urgent. We recognise that many thousands of Unite members rely on the civil and naval nuclear programmes for their jobs and for retention and development of skill across many sectors. These include shipbuilding, aerospace, transport, mechanical and electrical design, project management and IT, as well as many more in the supporting supply chains. Furthermore the successful renaissance of the civil nuclear industry depends heavily on the retention and development of the skills of these Unite members. We will therefore press the new government to ensure that Britain's legitimate defence equipment needs are met from domestic producers and that proper forward planning of the defence budget is used to protect jobs and to promote the smooth transition of manufacturing to non-military production wherever possible. A plan of diversification must ensure no loss of jobs or pay.

The question of Britain's nuclear weapons system is not about employment alone, however. It is first of all a moral issue, and then a strategic one concerning Britain's place in the world and the international environment we wish to see. Such weapons would, if used, constitute a mortal threat to humanity's survival; they are massively expensive; senior military figures have described them as 'militarily useless' and said that they should be scrapped; and our possession of them encourages other countries to seek a similar arsenal while undermining the efforts being made by President Obama to advance the cause of international nuclear disarmament. As a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Britain should therefore give a lead in discharging its obligations by seeking a replacement for Trident and abandoning plans to spend an estimated £76 billion on a new generation of nuclear weapons.

UNITE will not abandon its members employed in our nuclear arms industry and demands that, in the greater interests of peace and international nuclear disarmament, that the jobs and skills of Unite members are fully protected. We demand firm commitments to this end and we will do everything possible to support our members and their employment in the transition process to a de-nuclearised arms industry. Work on this process must be done now.

This must mean the rapid establishment of a properly financed Defence Diversification Agency (DDA) charged with developing new alternative industrial production which can make full use of the skills and experience of UNITE members currently engaged in nuclear weapons manufacture. This could include products needed for peaceful civil power generation, non-nuclear defence systems and/or products to combat climate change such as renewable energy generation and other green technology etc. The DDA should be charged with the task of bringing such alternative manufacture to current worksites e.g. Workington rather than force these workers to uproot and move to other parts of the country.

UNITE therefore commits to initiating research work as soon as is practicable on the development of a Defence Diversification Agency, to work with others including CLASS, the Labour Party and the TUC to find real practical alternatives to nuclear weapons manufacturing and to lobby the Government and the media to adopt this proposal as national government policy.

Exactly 40 years ago the Lucas Aerospace Shop Stewards Committee, faced with devastating cuts to arms manufacturing employment and the loss of their members' jobs, paved the way for this defence diversification initiative with their astoundingly visionary "Lucas Alternative Plan" which showed how an "Arms to Ploughshares" programme could work. UNITE owes it to their legacy to take their visionary ideas from the 1970's and make it a reality for our members tomorrow.

The enormous amount of money to be saved by ending our nuclear weapons system must be used to product the skills and jobs of UNITE members. This can and must be achieved by sustaining the process of defence diversification, vital to our manufacturing future, as well as freeing resources for investment in other socially useful forms of public spending.