

Britain: Industrial Diversification and the Civilian Economy instead of Trident and Arms Exports

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Global Research, November 23, 2017

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November 2017

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Environment](#), [Oil and Energy](#)

A growing number are urging Government to move support from the Trident project and arms export industry to other sectors that meet real needs and use highly skilled workers for constructive purposes, designing emission-free rail, road and waterway vehicles, advancing renewable energy, particularly wave and tidal energy, engineering low emission new-build housing and retrofitting much of the housing stock.

- [On the Lucas Plan website](#), following its 40th anniversary, we read that one of Labour Leader [Jeremy Corbyn's excellent reports](#), released during his 2015 election campaign, has put arms conversion firmly back on the political agenda.
- Following this, Steve Schofield, who is arguably the country's leading authority on arms conversion, wrote "[Defence Diversification or Arms Conversion? Why Labour needs a programme for nuclear and conventional disarmament](#)".
- The Campaign Against Arms Trade's 2015 case study "[Arms industry in the Clyde and renewable energy options](#)" examined an arms dependent area in depth.
- The Unite trade union, with its dual commitment to world peace and disarmament and to the protection of its members' jobs published "[Defence Diversification Revisited](#)" in March 2016. This looks at the history of "defence diversification" in the UK and elsewhere. At its July policy conference Unite committed itself to campaigning for a serious government approach to "defence diversification", condemning the failure of successive governments to grapple with the issue after the Cold War.
- In 2016, MEP Molly Scott Cato commissioned a report "[Devonport: Trident alternatives](#)", an overview of green employment potential.

In October this year, [Andrew Smith](#) cited a report from the [Stockholm International Peace Research Institute](#) which put the cost to tax payers of government support for the arms trade at [more than £100m a year](#), adding,

"This is to say nothing of the huge levels of political and logistical support that the arms companies are offered".

Widely accepted figures from the Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) are that arms exports [only count for](#) 0.2% of UK jobs and around 1% of exports. According to the MoD, 65,000 British jobs depend on arms exports and as the total number of jobs in the UK is just

over 30 million the arms trade accounts for a tiny fraction of total employment.

And this manufacturing sector is not flourishing – the ‘defence’ industry now represents only 10% of all manufacturing.

A range of housing has been built on the Royal Ordnance site in Euxton, where the land is so contaminated that vegetable growing is forbidden. Last month, BAE, major employers in the area, [announced](#) that it will be cutting up to 750 jobs Warton and Samlesbury plants in Lancashire and up to 400 people will be made redundant in Brough, East Yorkshire.

The Trades Union Congress, passed a [motion](#) in October calling for the Labour Party to set up a shadow defence diversification agency to engage with plant representatives, trades unions representing arms industry workers, and local authorities. The agency would listen to their ideas, so that practical plans can be drawn up for arms conversion while protecting skilled employment and pay levels.

Some opportunities are listed in the [Green New Deal Report](#) (2008) and the [Green Homes Guide](#)– just as relevant today or more so, as concerns about air pollution and climate instability escalate.

GND:

“At the high skilled end (engineering and electronic) design; though to medium and unskilled work making every building energy tight, and fitting more efficient energy systems in homes, offices and factories . . . putting in place a new regional grid system, ranging from large-scale wind, wave and tidal electricity to decentralised energy systems that increase domestic and local energy production”.

We add to their recommendations the designing of emission-free rail, road and waterway vehicles and of advances in tidal and wave power, which have enormous potential but are currently lagging far behind solar, wind and hydropower technologies.

As Matthew Lynn wrote in [The Spectator](#):

“There might be a case for maintaining a modest, specialised arms industry to support our own army. But anyone who thinks an export-driven defence industry is important to the economy should stop kidding themselves”.

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