

Tony Benn Was Right On WMD - And So Is Corbyn

By [David Lowry](#)

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The Labour Party conference this week closed with a row between shadow cabinet members over the renewal of the Trident nuclear WMD system.

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn sanely asserted he would never launch nuclear weapons if he became prime minister. But shadow defence secretary Maria Eagle and shadow foreign secretary Hilary Benn said that such affirmations were “unhelpful” — thereby indicating that they might support pressing the nuclear button, and immolating several million people in a split second.

At the beginning of June in his first parliamentary speech as Labour’s new shadow foreign secretary Hilary Benn made some important observations and arguments.

Adorned in the garb of a great social liberal, he marked the 50th anniversary of the suspension of capital punishment in Britain, which was followed by its abolition four years later, by saying: “The most important human right is the right to life,” adding that “we oppose the use of the death penalty in all circumstances.”

But oddly in the same speech he opined: “The ultimate responsibility of government is to defend the nation, and we remain committed to a minimum credible independent nuclear capability delivered through continuous at-sea deterrence while supporting global, multilateral disarmament negotiations and further reductions in stockpiles and numbers of weapons.”

Any use of nuclear weapons of mass destruction would result in the deaths, not of individuals by judicial fiat, but tens of millions of innocent civilian men, women and children, by political direction. Yet Benn argues in favour of this system to “defend the nation.”

His father, the great teacher and orator, long-time MP and minister, the late Tony Benn, had diametrically opposite views on the nature of nuclear weapons to his curiously misguided son.

Hilary Benn was very sensitive to criticism, especially calling his late father’s socialist and humanitarian views to attention, when I emailed him recently after his advocacy of Trident nuclear WMD in Parliament.

Here are just a few (of hundreds) denunciations of nuclear WMD by his father.

What’s the point of nuclear weapons? You can’t use them ... multilateralism ...
It’s an illusion. (Total Politics 2009.)

You see, I resigned from the front bench 50 years ago because I was a defence spokesman, the first shadow job I had, because I couldn't contemplate circumstances where we would ever be able to use nuclear weapons. (Interviewed by Andrew Neil.)

Under the arrangements that Britain has with the US that allow us access to their nuclear technology in the Trident programme, America has long insisted that it should have access to all our intelligence material. (The Guardian 2005.)

In Tony Benn's Letters to my Grandchildren, published in June 2010, he argues against developing Trident.

He describes how our nuclear weapons are dependent on the US — because we use their technology — and thus the “nuclear deterrent” is far from independent.

He questions whether nuclear weapons work as a deterrent for war anyway, and cites the Falklands war and various others. He also mentions the vast sums of money spent on Trident and the planetary disaster of a nuclear war, explaining that any person with good sense would not sanction the use of nuclear weapons.

In response to this, a prime minister who supports nuclear weapons would have to reassure everyone that he or she would be prepared to use nuclear weapons.

That is, the prime minister would be reassuring us that he or she is prepared to approve the killing of millions of people.

Hilary Benn, Maria Eagle and fellow nuclear travellers in the shadow cabinet should reconsider this betrayal of humanity they currently now advocate, in backing Trident nuclear WMD and their renewal at a cost of £100 billion to British taxpayers.

Corbyn is right on this life-and-death matter.

***Dr David Lowry** is former director of the European Proliferation Information Centre.*

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