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## **Trident row as Labour hit by fall in members**

James Lyons

LABOUR membership has fallen for the first time since Jeremy Corbyn became leader as the party becomes engulfed in a damaging new row over Trident, which his allies have likened to the Nazi gas chambers.

Closely guarded figures show that more than 1,000 people resigned from the party or saw their membership lapse in the week before last, "significantly more" than those who joined, according to a senior party source.

Corbyn is facing anger over his decision to speak at a Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) rally in London yesterday despite an outcry over the gas chambers comparison.

Labour CND, which lists the party leader and other hardleft MPs as supporters, made the comparison in a "speakers' fact file" briefing on its website.

"While no technology is ever 'uninvented', we regularly see an end to use or production, particularly where a technology is outlawed for humanitarian or legal reasons, such as the gas chambers of the Second World War," it states.

Admiral Lord West, the Labour peer and former security minister, and the shadow defence minister, Toby Perkins, condemned the briefing.

"Nobody likes nuclear weapons. People who believe in keeping our minimum nuclear deterrent don't like nuclear weapons," West said.

"But to try to pretend that trying to defend yourself from the threat of a particularly horrible weapon is the same as actually herding innocent people into a room and killing them in a horrible way, I'm afraid that is just stupid and it is offensive."

Thousands of people opposed to the renewal of the nuclear system took part in yesterday's rally, the biggest demonstration of its kind for a generation. But West said Corbyn was wrong to attend because the Labour defence review he set up to look at renewing Trident had not yet reported. He added. "What I would have hoped is that he would not have prejudged that, even though he has historically always been a CND person, and he would keep out of that sort of milieu until this full review is done and there is a full judgment that has been made on what policy is."

The row came as Corbyn faced fresh ridicule over his suggestion that the new generation of nuclear submarines could be built but not armed, an idea that has prompted jibes about them being glorified "ocean taxis" to transport troops around the world.

Unarmed subs would almost certainly need to replace missiles with concrete as ballast to maintain their carefully calculated buoyancy. "We've had nuclear subs without missiles, nuclear subs as ocean taxis. But this takes it to new depths," a government source said. "Labour's credibility on defence is diving faster than a submarine full of concrete."

West, the former first sea lord, has said he will quit Labour if it abandons its commitment to the nuclear deterrent. Thousands of other moderates have already left the party, with around 4,500 resigning or allowing their membership to lapse since the beginning of the year, a party source revealed. Until now those leaving have been outnumbered by new recruits, including around 6,000 since January 1. Signs that the trend is reversing will worry Corbyn and his allies, who insist that his popularity with members gives him the authority to overrule Labour MPs opposed to his hard-left agenda.

Fears that moderates face a purge will be fuelled this weekend by Corbyn's decision to hire Nick Parrott, who has worked as a political officer at the Unite union and for hard-left MPs, to oversee the party's response to constituency boundary reviews. Critics fear that the Labour leader will use a reduction in the number of MPs to get rid of opponents. The party is set to lose 24 of the 50 seats that go when the boundaries are redrawn.

Moderates had been reassured when they were told that the chief whip, Rosie Winterton, would oversee the process but news that Parrott had been hired to carry out a separate review has them rattled. One insider said: "Nick is not the sort of guy you get in because he is a statistical whizz - he's the sort of guy you get in to make sure your people are looked after."

Another added: "His brief will be to spy on Labour HQ and ensure hard-left MPs keep their seats." A source close to the Labour leader insisted: "People are seeing shadows where there are not any."