

Defence Diversification / Arms Conversion

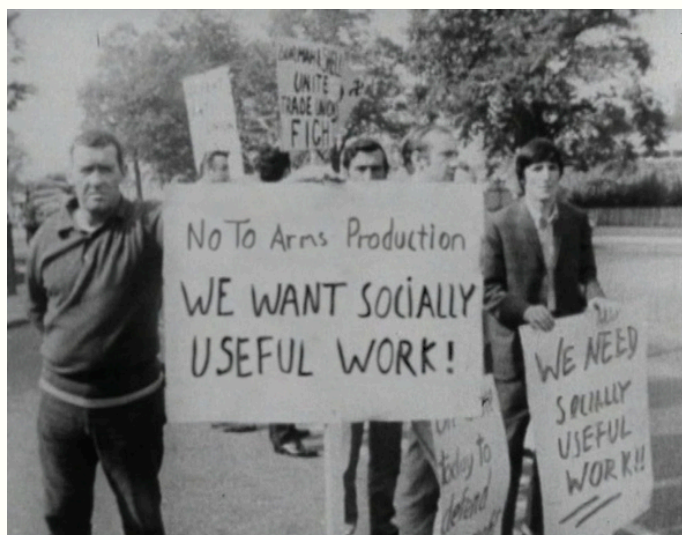
What do we mean by defence diversification / arms conversion?

Defence Diversification' and 'Arms Conversion' are different terms for the same process. Broadly, the term 'Defence Diversification' is more often used in trade union / industrial / political contexts whereas 'Arms Conversion' may be used more in peace movement or religious circles. They describe the same process of change: moving from producing military weapons to producing socially / ecologically useful goods instead. The concept is an ancient one. The following verse of the Bible is attributed to the prophet Isaiah who lived in the 8th century BC:

"And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more".^(1,2)



Why do people call for defence diversification?



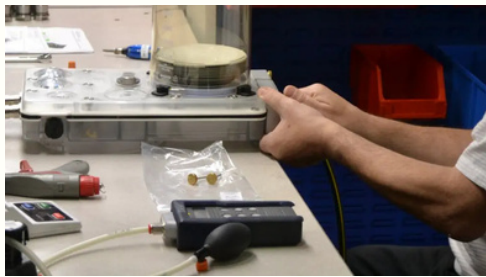
Trade unionists may advocate diversification of military industries to make workers' jobs more secure, or to give workers greater job satisfaction by using their skills to produce goods which benefit society. (The photo shows Lucas Aerospace engineers in the 1970s calling on their company to diversify⁽³⁾.) People may argue for defence diversification as a shift in political priorities e.g. redirecting resources to addressing poverty, improving health services or funding the transition to green energy. As well as these issues being very

important in their own right many people argue that addressing them are key to improving our security more widely. Individuals may call for arms conversion due to ethical, religious or political beliefs opposing the use of violence as a means to resolve conflict, and arguing for nonviolent alternatives. They may wish to stop arms production entirely: both weapons destined for our armed forces and weapons produced to sell abroad through the arms trade.

The Lucas Plan

In the 1970s, worried by the threat of redundancies, the Lucas Aerospace Combine Shop Stewards Committee put forward a groundbreaking alternative plan to diversify the products the company was producing. At that time Lucas Aerospace was 'Europe's largest designer and manufacturer of aircraft systems and equipment' ⁽⁴⁾. Roughly half of its contracts were defence-related. The plan included 150 product proposals, complete with technical specifications, for socially useful goods. They had been drawn up by the workforce in their spare time, taking into account the skills of the workers and company facilities. The product suggestions were in the 'areas of oceanics, transport, braking systems, medical technology, computer components and heating systems' and the designs included 'wind turbines, hybrid cars, heat pumps' ⁽⁵⁾ and the development of solar cell and fuel cell technologies ⁽⁶⁾. While the Lucas management refused to implement the plan, and the company no longer exists, the innovation and forward-thinking shown by the Lucas workers, showing the huge potential for diversification, remain inspirational today. Many of the technologies they were proposing all those years ago have since come to fruition via other routes.

Pandemic showed how rapidly industrial assembly lines could be repurposed



In early March 2020 the number of people with Covid-19 in the UK was rising rapidly. The government put a call out to UK companies 'to scale up the domestic production of ventilators' ⁽⁷⁾. In the consortium 'Ventilator Challenge UK' ^(7,8) the following sectors were represented: medical (6 companies), passenger cars (1), motor racing (8), military technology (7), aviation-civilian (3), academia / public sector (1), and general engineering / other (11).

(Note that some companies in the consortium were categorised in more than one sector) ⁽⁷⁾. The construction of a ventilator involved 700 individual parts, sourced from 88 suppliers. The first unit was produced just 4 weeks after the government's call. 12 weeks after that 11,700 units had been produced ⁽⁷⁾. This was achieved by 'converting four manufacturing sites, each one in a different company in a different sector and in a different part of the country' ⁽⁷⁾. In engineering terms, and in industrial conversion terms, it was an extraordinary achievement.

Building a consensus for permanent change

One reason given for the very successful example of industrial conversion above, was 'a shared social goal – with a specific and urgent health aim' ⁽⁷⁾. Businesses, trade unions and the government all working together. However, when the pandemic passed the assembly lines converted back. The challenge is to build consensus for a long-term and permanent shift from producing goods which are destructive to our security to producing socially useful and ecological products.

Defence Diversification and the work of Conscience

Conscience campaigns for a change in the law so that people have the right to conscientiously object to paying the military part of their taxes, and for the money to be allocated to peaceful purposes instead. In 2016 Conscience launched the *Taxes For Peace Bill* in parliament. An important section of the Bill had the heading, 'Allocation of Peace Tax to Non-Military Security'. Included as an example of non-military security was 'the conversion of industrial production from military to non-military purposes' ⁽⁹⁾. This is the same as defence diversification or arms conversion.