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Thousands take to streets as Scotland voices its opposition to "ghastly" Trident weapons

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IN what was thought to be the biggest national peace demonstration north of the Border since the last Iraq war, more than 10,000 Scots have taken part in anti-Trident protests ahead of tomorrow's Commons vote on renewing the nuclear weapons system.

Anti-Trident protests were held yesterday (Sat) in 36 Scottish cities, towns and villages, with locations including Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Dundee, Inverness, Dumfries and Largs, which were all organised within days of it being announced the Westminster vote would take place.

Armed forces veterans, anti-war campaigners, students, parents and their children carrying anti-nuclear banners and singing pro-peace songs sent a clear message to MPs that Scotland was overwhelmingly against renewing the Trident system, which the Ministry of Defence estimates will cost £31bn over 20 years.

The Scottish Scrap Trident coalition, which organised the demonstrations, said events in areas such as Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Paisley attracted hundreds, with others protests also held in Largs and Cromarty.

Coalition spokesman David Mackenzie suggested that the demonstrations were among the biggest since the 2003 Iraq war, and said : "Early calculations indicate that this is one of the biggest public demonstrations in Scotland for many years, showing just how people outraged people feel about this ghastly business."

Organisers said the event in Glasgow city centre was one of the biggest in Scotland, with more than 500 crowded around the city's Buchanan Street steps, where anti-Trident posters and art work was held up by children.

Jana Brock, a German-born Glasgow University research fellow, said she had decided to go on the demonstration for her four month-old baby Arabella, who she brought with her to the gathering near the Donald Dewar statue.

The 37-year-old, said : "I've lived in Scotland for three years and it's where I'd like to settle because of the progressive and different views there are on things like Trident, but I feel like we're being overruled on it.

"MPs voting to renew Trident would be wasteful and irresponsible and no one seems to want it here."

Meanwhile, politicians from Labour and the SNP gave speeches stating their opposition to the renewal of the weapons system at Faslane, which is opposed by 58 of Scotland's 59 MPs, with only Tory Scottish Secretary David Mundell expected to support its retention.

Glasgow Central SNP MP Alison Thewliss, who attended the city protest with her young daughter, told the Sunday Herald that the protests were aimed at keeping all parts of the UK 'nuclear free' and not just simply having Trident removed from the Clyde.

She said : "There's a real danger that this is being imposed upon Scotland, but it's not just about Scotland as no-one wants nuclear weapons in ports in other parts of the UK/

"So if we can get rid of Trident in Scotland we can do it for the rest of the UK too."

Thewliss said she would seek to take the views of those who were on the protests into the Commons tomorrow when MPs vote on Trident renewal.

She said : "It's appalling that all that money is being wasted on nuclear weapons by the UK Government with an economic plan that doesn't stack up and for a system that isn't as effective as conventional defence."

Alannah Maurer, who served in the Army's Royal Corps of Signals, was on the Glasgow protest as part of the 'Navy Not Nuclear' group, whose members campaign for the replacement of a Trident with a conventional non-nuclear defence.

Maurer, whose home faces the Faslane base, said : "I feel like the decision has already been made by the UK Government and that they are just going to go ahead with renewing a weapons system that would make the whole of Scotland disappear if it was set off."

Meanwhile, SNP MP Tommy Sheppard commenting on Twitter from the Edinburgh demonstration where around 500 people gathered, said : "Bowled over by the turnout at Edinburgh demo. Pleased to stand with the people."

A spokesman for campaigners at Largs said : "We are delighted that over 50 people have gathered here at very short notice, folk of all ages, not to mention a few dogs. We are here to show our anger at the plans to renew Trident. We have had poetry and have signed a pledge to continue the struggle.

"It's not over."