The decision on the UK MoD to place an order for 4 new ships with a Korean builder has whipped up a storm of protest. Below is a sample.

The Labour Party has highlighted a letter from one of the bidders. Key quotes from the letter from the Chief Executive of Fincantieri to the Defence Secretary, dated 12.02.12, are reported to be:

"We provided a covering letter stating our intentions to generate 100% European content and at least 35% work-share for UK companies."

"We have offered to share the design and build the MARS tanker with [BAE Systems]... the proposal involves building the second tanker in the UK."

"I consider it of paramount importance to build the MARS tanker in Europe to preserve naval shipbuilding skills within the EU and to attract valuable tax benefits in a prolonged period of industrial decline."

"It is also appropriate to consider the great military strategic relationship between our countries, evidenced in the recent Libyan, Afghanistan and other conflicts where our military have worked in close co-operation for a common objective."

Shadow Defence Secretary Jim Murphy MP said:

"When the Defence Secretary was at the Department for Transport he gave the important Thameslink contract to a firm who will build the trains in Germany. Now at the MoD he has given a Navy contract to a firm who will build vessels in South Korea. A worrying pattern is emerging of 'not made in Britain' being his preferred choice.

"Warm words about British manufacturing are not good enough if decisions made at home keep benefiting companies overseas. Communities up and down the country want a defence industrial strategy to support jobs and growth."

Shadow Minister for Defence Procurement, Alison Seabeck MP said:

"There are a number of clear questions for the government to answer having awarded a contract to a Korean company who have proposed to carry out less of the work in Britain than the rival European bid. Ministers must explain their handling of the bidding process, the structure of the tender and the perception that the MoD simply lacks a good understanding of the capabilities of British industry.

"In the aftermath of the Bombardier fiasco and coming just weeks after the Prime Minister's complacency was cited as a reason for the loss of a multi-billion pound fighter jet contract to the French, this is just another example of a Conservative-led government failing to put its weight behind the British economy."

Keith Hazlewood, GMB National secretary for shipbuilding, said "GMB has sought and will continue to seek to get these four MARS tankers for the Royal Navy deemed as "warlike " ships. If they are deemed as "warlike" they would need to be built in the UK under previous Government defence procurement rules.

"GMB consider that these ships for the Royal Navy are "warlike"- and like the Type 45 destroyers, the aircraft carriers and future surface combatant ships – the type 26 frigates- they should be built in the UK.

"These ships could be put in a war zone to refuel warships and to provide support for amphibious and land forces close to the shore. They need to be equipped with proper defences to protect the Royal Navy personnel on board, the helicopters that operate from them and the ships themselves.

"There are gaps in the order books after the carriers and Type 26 frigates are finished. Placing orders for these 4 ships in UK yards are essential to retaining the skills and the capability in the UK. Maintaining capability is a strategic issue. The MOD are risking the UK defence capability by placing this order in Korea.

"We now understand that Daewoo is the "preferred bidder" and that the orders have not yet been signed. GMB will be seeking further meetings with MOD on this. GMB is also calling on elected representatives to step up the pressure to get the vessels deemed as what they are as "warlike", reverse poicy to what it was and for them to be built in the UK.

"I am very angry about this and so be will the UK's shipbuilders. This will only exacerbate the upcoming problems which we are facing throughout the UK shipbuilding industry re the workload gap following carrier. Surly this was work we needed to fill the gap in the programme. and how can it possibly be best value to the tax payer essentially exporting money and jobs which should not only be spent in the UK but would also help protect design and build capabilities along with the obvious increased job security for the Shipbuilding industry.

"The difficulties of skill retention within the industry will get worse. This decision leads to serious questions over the government policy as regards the White Paper and the 'off the shelf' mantra which they are peddling. "

Ian Waddell, Unite national officer for aerospace and shipbuilding, said: "This is the latest betrayal of UK manufacturing by a government that seems hell bent on destroying our capacity to build anything. It is a stark demonstration of what the government's defence procurement policy of 'buying off the shelf' means - exporting jobs.

"Why was there no British bid for this work and why weren't we told that the Italian bid included

substantial UK content? Why has no account been taken of the costs of sacking UK workers and the loss of tax revenues if the work is done overseas?

"Time and time again this government fails to support and protect UK industry whilst simultaneously arguing for the need to rebalance the economy with manufacturing growth. It is double speak of the worst kind and UK shipyard workers will not forget that this Tory-led government says one thing but does another."

Reacting to this news Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions (CSEU) general secretary, Hugh Scullion, said: "This is a bitter blow for UK shipbuilding. Only last week the CSEU went to see defence minister Peter Luff to urge him to support the UK defence industry. We raised the MARS contract and argued that UK taxpayers' money should be spent supporting UK jobs when equipment is bought for UK forces. It is what every other developed country seems to be able to do."