

By IAN SUTHERLAND

The discovery that, as a member of one of the 481 community councils within Strathclyde region's boundaries, you may soon be called upon to undertake a controversial aspect of public service far removed from pressing elected members' about holes in the road, utility street lamps or the local Tufty Club's annual grant, can come in mysterious ways.

Jim Perman, an occasionally colourful and often outspoken member of the 10-person Largs community council, learned that he, or someone nominated by his council, might become an integral part of Scotland's civil defence system, via a chance meeting with a constituent in the local pub.

His informant, it seems, had noticed a job ad from Strathclyde's emergency planning department, became interested, went down to the library, and found a copy of the Civil Defence (General Local Authority Functions) Scotland Regulations, 1983. A bemused Mr Perman spent the rest of the evening warding off bad jokes about bunkers and whether he'd abuse his emergency powers (ITV's Rules of Engagement was showing at the time).

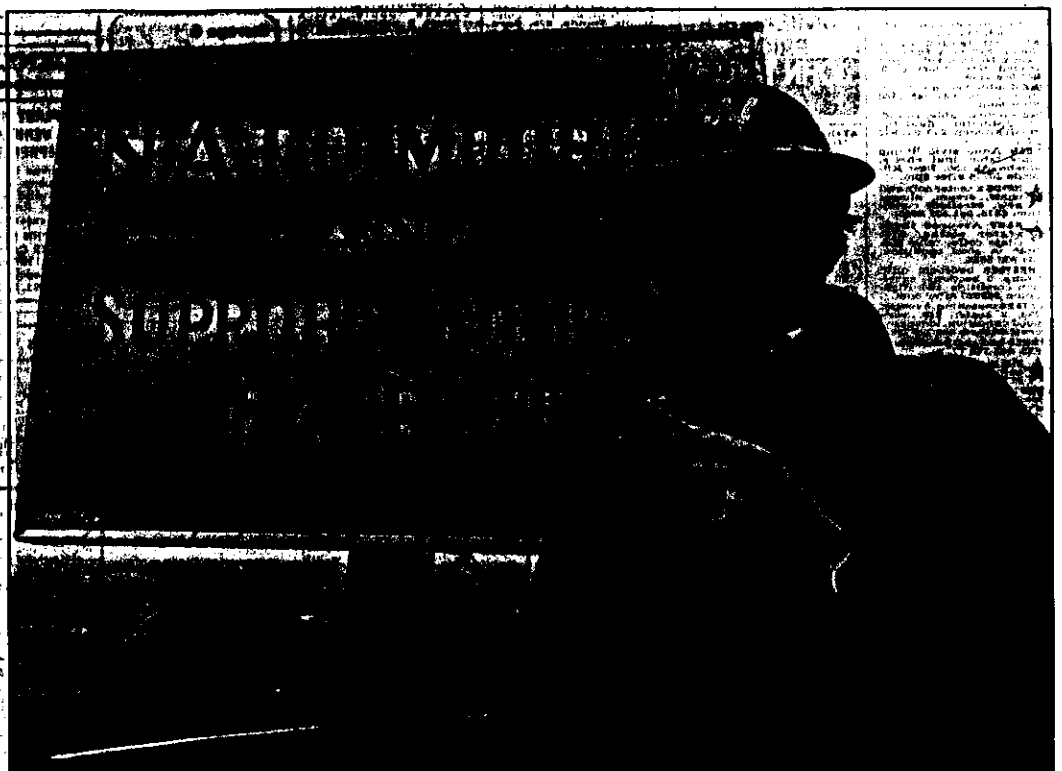
When Mr Perman finally read the regulations as they pertain to community councils, his reaction wasn't atypical of public attitudes to civil defence in general. "I thought for a second that someone had dreamed this up and put it in the reference library for a stunt."

The 1983 regulations are, of course, not a joke. The document freely admits that loss of life in a nuclear attack will be massive. It places clear duties on Scottish local authorities to prepare civil defence plans, involving emergency feeding and sheltering, fire-housing, roof, the homeless, and the establishment of basic communications systems. Jim Perman discovered that regulation 4 (1) (f) requires the recruitment of volunteers to provide humanitarian and support services in war. For this, Strathclyde region might arrange for the training of "community advisers" — drawn from community council ranks.

A massively Labour controlled authority, deeply critical of nuclear bases in Scotland, and a self-proclaimed Nuclear Free Zone, Strathclyde has already argued against Government civil defence planning, arguing that, with numerous targets, the west of Scotland would, bluntly, cease to exist in a future war.

But regulations are regulations. Despite their doubts, Strathclyde must now proceed to implement central government war plans, and recruitment of community advisers in co-operation with community councils throughout the region is a vital ingredient in the exercise.

John McVicar, Strathclyde's emergency officer, knows that selling the idea of community advisers — trained volunteers providing expertise and support to survivors at grass-roots level — isn't going to be easy. Jim Perman, a supporter of no



Community councillor Jim Perman prepared for action, with a little help from West Kilbride Museum: "The Government can phone me when the Russians reach the edge of town."

# Last line of defence after the holocaust?

non-payment of Road Tax, are to be taken very seriously indeed.

John McVicar also recalls that, in the 1930s, music hall comedians sent up ARP provisions — with songs like You Can't Come In My Shelter. For It's Far Too Wee. Scceptical attitudes to civil defence may have had, he suggests, a seriously detrimental effect when the Luftwaffe blitzed Clydebank in 1941. Public jesting played no small part in ending the war-time Civil Defence Corps in 1968.

Now that Scotland's largest region, with 2.5m people, is moving to implement Government regulations, even a random survey of community council activist opinion suggests what the process will be very much an uphill task. Glasgow's Cokerhill has perhaps Scotland's most active community council and they've fought road expansion and railway closures, built their own community centre with minimal resources and are now being asked to recruit volunteers to help local housewives, themselves, in 1983, anti-nuclear campaigners, and forced to recall his own WW2 Home Guard and ARP experiences.

What we get doesn't cover our stamps." And Alison Hay also worries that, however well-meaning are current State intentions, the new corps could ultimately be mis-used and become a localised "snoper" force. The idea, however tenuous, that community advisers might be confronted with identifying "subversive" authority in the prelude to a war does deter activists from responding. West Kilbride community council member Finlay Currie, an ex-policeman, is used to giving and accepting responsibility. In theory, he would join a new civil defence corps and there will always be a possibility of survival for some, and local level

community councils have been starved of cash and resources. Borders Region implemented central government regulations soon after they were issued. This seems to have been a success, though emergency planner Stan Yates wryly recalls that CND activists picketed early grass-roots training courses. Now perhaps 60 community-based advisers have been schooled in the use of radiation monitoring instruments and "control points" have been set up in small communities throughout the region. Other largely rural regions are following suit. Unlike in the west of Scotland, however, major nuclear targets are thinner on the ground, and public expectations of survival correspondingly higher.

As Strathclyde moves in coming months to recruit community advisers throughout the giant region, old arguments about nuclear policy will, inevitably, be re-fought. But more subtle controversies seem set to emerge too. If community councils are deemed vital in war, their doggedly non-party memberships may well demand greater recognition and resources in peace.

Walter Morrison notes that suggestions that a Scottish Convention of Community Councils be fostered have regularly fallen on deaf political ears. If a new role is offered, and