

# God protect us from our protectors

RAY BURNETT, councillor for Benbecula, reflects on the messages which emerge following the controversial Civil Defence seminar held recently in Stornoway

Civil Defence, if we are to believe our leading 'protectors' in Scotland, is essentially a 'humanitarian activity'. There is nothing secret about it; we are assured, nor is there anything sinister involved. All the better therefore that the public at large should know how our protectors plan to protect us — or even who our protectors are.

Unless the self-styled members of the 'civil defence community' know certain things they would rather we did not know, unless this cosy new 'nuclear war is survivable' fraternity know there are aspects of their assumptions, plans and intentions which would make the community as a whole deeply uneasy, why must their 'learning situations' always be conducted behind closed doors before an invited audience of their own trustworthy and reliable ranks of, mostly uniformed, protectors? Events in Stornoway recently suggest it is little wonder they are reluctant to face open public debate.

The trouble with the all-packaged, mutually-reinforcing line is that it only holds credibility if its assumptions are taken as unquestionable, if its scenario of nuclear war is naively accepted as 'reasonable' and if its assurances of innocent military planning are meekly gone along with as being in 'the public interest'.

Take the assumptions to begin with. The deadliest — as propounded by ex-Brigadier J B Bettridge, Principal of the Government's Civil Defence College at Easingwold, is that "deterrents work". But for the threat of nuclear weapons to be effective you must be able to show your enemy that you are prepared to use them — and use them first, if necessary. On this basic assumption, that NATO's first-strike policy is both justifiable and tenable, it then becomes central to the argument in favour of waging a 'winnable' nuclear war to have a Civil Defence programme. For as the ex-Brigadier — now senior civil organiser for the Government in this

field — puts it: "How can you use nuclear weapons unless you show you are prepared for a nuclear scenario?"

This fundamental argument that Civil Defence is a central element in the justification of nuclear weapons and their intended use is made even more explicit by Lt Col J F Logan (ret.), Liaison Officer for Civil Defence at Army HQ in Scotland. The Colonel bluntly argues that: "If NATO is to succeed" — presumably in its first-strike policy — "then it must have a secure UK base." The threat to this country, we are told, is espionage, sabotage, subversion and Soviet Special Forces. "An assessment of the morale and will of our people" — our willingness to endorse nuclear war, that is — "is of great interest to the Warsaw Pact." Which again is where Civil Defence comes in. We need to show the Soviets we are "resolute in our Home Defence", because, "if we get that right then we are poised for the nuclear." The nuclear what? The nuclear pre-emptive strike, of course, the 'winnable' nuclear war.

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which were found to be higher than the final death count can be used to assure us that "there will be survivors". And as long as there will be survivors, we have a duty to prepare for them. And, underlying it all, as long as nuclear war is survivable it is therefore 'winnable', therefore nuclear weapons and a nuclear military strategy is justified.

For good measure, the reassuring calculations of a genial boffin can be presented to show that — under what Prof J H Martin of Dundee University will assure you is "a reasonable attack pattern" — then there is no need to worry, "as millions will survive".

Once questioned in detail about the likely scenario in the aftermath of a nuclear attack, particularly as it applies to a scattered and vulnerable area such as the Western Isles, then the 'experts' become curiously shy and vague. Ex-Brigadier Bettridge of Easingwold justifies this by saying: "Some local authorities ask us to tell them where the likely targets are. We have to say that we know the capabilities of our enemy but not their intentions. We can only make general assumptions, such as the UK is particularly vulnerable because of its role as a major NATO forward staging base." The implications of this for the key forward-staging base for NATO currently under construction at Stornoway, or the fall-back airport facilities at Balivanich, were not specified.

According to the Civil Defence College Principal, the only morally-tenable position is to plan for nuclear attacks but do not try and count the cost.

Counting the cost in the Western Isles could be difficult. With the bulk of the post-holocaust planning administration based in Inverness, and the Fire Service HQ based in

Tayside, the resources in the islands will be thin indeed. It is admitted that because of the requisition of ferries, planes, etc for military purposes, island youngsters, families and relatives on the mainland would not get home. And those on the various islands would be compelled to stay put. For those not killed outright by a nuclear strike against Stornoway airport, Balivanich airport or the various advance radar facilities in the islands, there would be no effective communications network, no health care provisions for blast or radiation injuries "until such time it was possible to get to them".

There is, of course, much play made of the role of community volunteers in a nuclear war situation. Significantly and most ominously, it was the military authorities who went into this in greatest detail, as the co-operation of the civil community with the military was "an essential ingredient of Civil Defence". The mechanism for this 'co-operation' is the network of Joint Services Liaison Officers, the senior one of which and the only regular military man is the JSLO based at R A Range (Hebrides), Balivanich.

With nuclear war imminent he would travel to Stornoway with his Adjutant and four soldiers, there to liaise with the Naval and RAF LOs and the focal civilian figure, Comhairle nan Eilean's Emergency Planning Officer. Amongst other things they would mobilise the pre-selected civilian volunteers and their designated commanders. Lt Col Logan of Army HQ, Scotland, made it clear what their particular role would be — to combat subversion and sabotage. The sabotage threat comes from Soviet 'Speznaz', perhaps swarming ashore from the Ullapool klondykers. The subversion comes from those who may try and

dissuade TA volunteers from going to the front-line in Germany or from those who would seek to challenge this newly-formed authority.

None of the 'civil defence community' deny that draconian draft legislation exists; they merely say it will not be used, there are no dossiers on peace activists, no lists of possible subversives, etc. Lt Col Logan was more candid: "Dissent is all very well within a democracy, but there comes a point where we must hold the line." Those who draw the line, of course, are the Civil Defence community itself. Those outside it and therefore suspect are, in Mrs Thatcher's phrase, "the enemy within".

At the core of the volunteers of the Civil Defence community are the military, the police, the fire services, special constables etc — and, above all, the ranks of the Royal Observer Corps because, as the Army top brass like to put it: "They are a uniformed organisation. And as such it helps them to develop a common sense of duty and purpose."

In a newspeak that would have done George Orwell proud, ex-Brigadier Bettridge claims: "People under stress look for direction. They look for someone in authority. They will prefer being told what to do by the military, the police and those in authority over them."

This is the essence of Civil Defence revealed at its most frightening. "The new term," they tell us, "is Civil Protection." But what it is planned to protect is the military capacity of NATO and its vital UK forward-bases.

If this whole terrifying scenario is meant to be humanitarian then the only moral course open is to keep on protesting to survive, otherwise there will be no humanity. And if this is what is termed Civil Protection, then God protect us from our protectors.

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To use Civil Defence to justify a military strategy based on the unleashing of a nuclear war is, nonetheless, a risky propaganda exercise. To ease the public mind further assumptions are carefully cultivated.

We are told, by ex-Brigadier Bettridge, that "the modern approach to Civil Defence is now an all-hazards approach". Which means that preparing for a nuclear holocaust or the disaster of a nuclear winter is lumped in with emergency planning for a major oil spillage in the Minch or an explosion at the Stornoway gas works. This allows the furtherance of Civil Defence as an essential ingredient to the waging of nuclear war to be smuggled in with preparing for general emergencies, "with which no sensible person could disagree". It also serves the purpose of minimising the reality of a nuclear attack. It cleverly fosters the illusion that nuclear disasters are like any other disaster, only a wee bit bigger.

This promotion of bogus and dangerously misleading assumptions is taken further by the scenario depicted of a prolonged period of conventional war, escalating finally to nuclear attacks. This enables endless reference back to the last war. The spirit, courage and organisation displayed during the Blitz can be brought forth again. The projections of civilian casualties