

EFFECTS / COSTS

Civ Def

Experts calculate up to 1.8m dead in London and 1.7m injured

# WHO study <sup>e. 3/3/84</sup> says no health service could cope with 1-megaton bomb

By Andrew Veitch, Medical Correspondent

No health service in the world would be capable of dealing with the casualties caused by a single one-megaton nuclear bomb according to an international group of experts appointed by the World Health Organisation.

The group whose task was to calculate the effects of a nuclear war on health and health services included Sir Douglas Black, former president of the Royal College of Physicians, Dr Nikolai Bochkov, director of the Institute of Medical Genetics in Moscow, and Professor A. Leaf, professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School, Boston.

Their findings, published yesterday, echo on a worldwide scale those of the British Medical Association's report last year on the effects of a nuclear war on Britain — a report described by ministers as alarmist.

The WHO group chose London for their scenario because the difference in population between London today and Hiroshima in 1945 is proportionately the same as the difference between a one-megaton bomb and the 12.5-kiloton bomb dropped 39 years ago.



Sir Douglas Black: British member of team

They calculate that between 1.6 million and 1.8 million would be killed immediately, and another 1.6 million to 1.7 million would be injured.

In a second scenario they assume that military targets are attacked in central Europe. If 20 megatons of bombs are used, 9 million people would be killed or seriously injured, and another 9 million would be less seriously injured.

In an all-out war, they assume that 10,000 megatons

are exploded throughout the world, 90 per cent of them in Europe, Asia, and North America, the rest in Africa, Latin America, and Oceania.

"Half the world's population, more than 2.2 billion people would be immediate victims of the war," the group reports.

It is difficult to see how procedures developed for conventional war could be applied to situations where the number of casualties could run into millions, the group says. "Hospitals and other care centres would be reduced to rubble, fires would rage, survivors would be panic-stricken, or, as in Hiroshima, reduced to a state of stupor. Help, if available at all, would be prevented from reaching the people who needed it by the omnipresence of radiation."

Dust clouds would mask the sun, disruption of the ozone layer would permit more ultraviolet radiation to reach the earth's surface causing more blindness and cancer, there would be widespread famine. "Many millions of survivors from the immediate attack would die of starvation and malnutrition during the ensuing few years."

The group, which also inclu-

ded specialists from Sweden, Austria, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Japan, France and Venezuela, says: "As doctors and scientists the members feel that they have both the right and the duty to draw attention in the strongest possible terms to the catastrophic results that would follow any use of nuclear weapons."

"The immediate and the delayed loss of human and animal life would be enormous, and the effect on the fabric of civilisation would be either to impede its recovery or make recovery impossible."

"The plight of survivors would be physically and psychologically appalling. The partial or complete disruption of the health services would deprive survivors of effective help."

They add: "It is not for the committee to outline the political steps by which the threat can be removed, but mankind cannot be secure until that is done."

*Effects of nuclear war on health and health services: Report of the international committee of experts in medical sciences and public health. Price SwF+20 (about £6.25) World Health Organisation, Geneva, Switzerland.*