

T. 17/7/85

TV link call to assess nuclear fear

A suggestion that there should be a worldwide television link so that the fears views of ordinary people could be taken into account in nuclear disarmament talks was made by an American defence expert yesterday.

Mr Elliot Richardson, former US Ambassador to Britain, said that nine tenths of the world's population were not represented at disarmament talks. It was extraordinary that they had been so passive.

He told the meeting: "Most of us feel like the young people who watched Live Aid around the world; there must be some means whereby our feelings as citizens could be communicated to people who seem to be engaged in a ritualistic protest in which our ability to achieve action is constrained by their need to score points for their sides or by fear that concessions they make will be somehow repudiated at home."

Mr Paul C. Warnke, former chief US strategic arms negotiator at the Salt II talks, said: "We have to get a Strategic Defence Initiative (star wars plan) off centre stage. It tended to dominate disarmament discussions."

Professor Lawrence Friedman, of the department of war studies at King's College London, said that President Reagan had said that nuclear weapons could be made obsolete. "This is something that cannot be delivered."

T. 8/7/85

More fear presence of US missile sites

By David Walker, Social Policy Correspondent

There has been an increase in the number of people who believe that the siting of American nuclear missiles in Britain makes it a less safe place to live, according to an exhaustive survey published in *British Social Attitudes*.

In 1983 48 per cent said that US missiles made Britain less safe and the figure rose to 51 per cent last year.

Support for the British nuclear deterrent is strong but slipping: in 1983, 60 per cent said they thought that independent missiles made Britain safer and in 1984 the figure was 56 per cent.

British Social Attitudes is the second annual report from the independent group, Social and Community Planning Research.

It is trying to build a five-year dossier on British attitudes and how they are changing.

Times 20.3.85

Head start for the holocaust

By Andrew Veitch
Medical Correspondent

THE RISKS of human error triggering a nuclear war are unacceptably high, Britain's leading psychologists warned yesterday. The Government has underestimated the danger, they said. They urged ministers to publish details of failures in nuclear weapon systems.

The warning came at the launching of the British Psychological Society's report on nuclear war, written by Dr James Thompson, senior lecturer at the Middlesex Hospital medical school, London.

It condemns the Government's civil defence plans, and suggests that arms negotiators set up problem-solving workshops to break down entrenched positions.

The US Defence Department had admitted to 31 major nuclear accidents by 1981. Professor James Reason, head of psychology at Manchester University, pointed out. Independent Swedish research had found

113 such accidents in western forces before 1977.

The US Congress had reported that 5,000 service personnel a year were removed from nuclear weapons duties because of alcohol or drug abuse, criminal activities, negligence, or mental problems.

Dr Thompson has gained access to court martial papers of two US servicemen convicted of drugs offences at Holy Loch. One, a nuclear weapons guard, had marijuana on board ship. Another, a fireman on the USS Holland mother ship was using and trading in LSD, cocaine, and amphetamines.

As weapons control systems become more complex, human error becomes more likely, particularly, when operators are working under stress.

Yet the nuclear power plant accidents at Three Mile Island and elsewhere show that human factors are not sufficiently taken into account by systems designers.

Techniques used by engineers and the military to calculate error probabilities result in "spurious figures," Professor Reason said.

"If you are to predict error you have to start from within the individual. We have to do more sensible things to prevent dangerous errors. To do that, the Government must give access to the data on error failure rates. We need to know what kind of errors people make and under what conditions they make them."

It describes six symptoms of what it calls "Group Think" that throw some light on the conduct of Britain and Argentina in the Falklands war: An illusion of invulnerability; collective attempts to ignore or rationalise information challenging shaky but cherished assumptions; an unquestioned belief in the group's morality; stereotyping the enemy as too evil for negotiations or too stupid to be a threat; a shared illusion of unanim-

ity; and the appearance of self-appointed mind-guards to protect the group from adverse information.

The society's vice president Dr Halla Beloff, of Edinburgh University said that the government's civil defence plans — which assume that people will survive if they stay at home and take shelter — were based on misconceptions about human behaviour.

Research had shown that 40 per cent of Londoners would flee to the country in the mistaken belief that it would be safer, she said. Panic would not be the problem.

It was more likely that survivors of the initial attack would be dazed, bewildered, and apathetic — they would function in a rigid mechanical fashion.

Psychological Aspects of Nuclear War, by Dr James Thompson, published by the British Psychological Society and John Wiley, price £5.95.