

Living with the nuclear threat: A warning from the "War Game" man

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W.H.C.F.

BRIAN WILSON on the making of Peter Watkins' new film, due out to mark the 40th anniversary of Hiroshima

Long before there was "Threads", there was "The War Game" — the film commissioned by the BBC 19 years ago about the aftermath of nuclear war which the BBC refused to show because the Government told them not to. It won an Oscar in 1966, but remains banned from world television by the BBC.

"The War Game" has, however, been shown since then on flickering black and white screens in a number of chilly school rooms and village halls. Arguably it may be the most efficient means of education for the peace movement. But the man who made it, Peter Watkins, was deeply embittered by the BBC's sponsorship of his work and has since reworked in Britain again.

Last week, however, he was filming in Lewis, after six years of international fund raising he is now making the long awaited sequel to "The War Game". He will also be

filming in the United States, Soviet Union, Norway, France, West German, Australia, Japan, Polynesia, Mexico and one of the African nations.

The new film will not simply be an updated "War Game", dramatising the aftermath of an 'Eighties-style nuclear war — infinitely more horrific than what was envisaged in 1965. Indeed, Watkins expresses concern that the upsurge in such dramatisations may be having the effect of trivialising the cataclysmic consequences.

The new film will, however, dramatisise some of the likely events in the the period of crisis leading up to nuclear war — for instance, in Norway the evacuation of the civilian population and in this country the introduction of draconian emergency laws involving the dissolution of local government and the mass arrests of "subversives".

But Watkins' new film will be more concerned with personalising the nuclear issue through discussions with dozens of families, individuals

and groups all over the world. The film will be about living with the nuclear threat today, more than about envisaging the ultimate consequences.

In Lewis, Watkins was concerned to observe the development and tailing-off of the anti-militarist movement, Keep NATO Out. The underlying arguments, both for and against the Stornoway base, were filmed at a meeting in Aird attended by over 30 people. The discussion, which was conducted entirely in Gaelic, ran for two and a half hours. It was in the view of those present a model for the debating of serious issues through the language which Gaelic television has rarely if ever captured.

Watkins also filmed a discussion among the KNO committee — not on the righteousness of their case, but as an illustration of an international truth. It is that those who persist in opposition to militarism are likely to become increasingly isolated and branded as

cranks while the mass of the population is lured back into disinterest or resignation.

Financing for the film has come from a vast number of sources — churches in the United States, regional government in Japan, 14 Scottish local authorities, the Soviet Peace Committee, the National Film Board of Canada and the Mexican Film Institute, to mention but a few.

After leaving Stornoway last week, Watkins filmed in Glasgow, the simulation of councillors being arrested by the City Chamber under the Emergency Powers (Fire) Act, then in Boston in March.

Watkins will keep up the pace until the filming is completed towards the end of the year. His aim is to have the finished product ready for showing by the 40th anniversary of Hiroshima next summer. It will then be produced in a wide range of languages including those of the underdeveloped world which sophisticated mankind will take with us if we keep going in the same direction as at present.

like materials. we feel it is ironic to call a peace balloon warlike when they call nuclear missiles peacemakers,' says John Sprange.

The law under which they have been charged was drafted after the war to control German rearmament. On conviction, it provides for sentences of up to 15 years, or, in serious cases, life imprisonment or death. (It is not thought that the Public Prosecutor of West Berlin, Klaus Muller, has this latter punishment in mind.)

The irony of charging peace demonstrators with a law designed to control rearmament seems to be lost on Muller.

'Nuclear winter' tour angers Whitehall

by ROBIN MCKIE, Science Correspondent

THE arrival of a group of top American and Russian scientists here this week threatens to trigger a political row over the concept of the 'nuclear winter' theory.

Government Ministers have already denounced the visit — to present recent research on the climatic impact of nuclear war — as 'blatant propa-ganda'. In turn, scientists organising the tour have accused the Government of acting with 'criminal irresponsibility' by refusing to study such effects here.

The scientists, including US biologist Professor Paul Ehrlich and Soviet academician Dr Georgiy Golitsyn, begin their 11-city tour on Tuesday in Sheffield. They believe that atomic bomb blasts would fling huge dust clouds into the air, ring the world with debris, lower temperatures, blot out all light and extinguish most forms of life.

Scientists Against Nuclear Arms (SANA) helped to arrange the conferences to allow local authorities, and other bodies responsible for civil control 'after the bomb', to hear directly from the nuclear winter theory's proponents.

While local councils were keen to attend, most statutory bodies — like police, gas and water authorities, all with important

civil defence roles — have ignored invitations, said a SANA spokesman. In London most boroughs will be represented but only two health authorities and the North Thames gas board have agreed to go along. Police, water and other authorities have not answered.

Government sensitivity about criticism of its civil defence plans is shown by the Home Office's ignoring the invitation in London and the refusal of a request for Scottish government scientists to attend the Glasgow conference.

Scottish Home Office Minister, Michael Ancram, described the nuclear winter tour as an empty political gesture. 'We are not prepared to support blatant propaganda exercises which deliberately seek to mislead people about civil defence,' he said.

Mr Ancram claimed that a likely air attack on Britain would probably be a conventional one. If there was escalation, a nuclear attack might still only be limited. It was misleading to always concentrate on all-out nuclear attack scenarios, he said.

His comments were described as 'idiotic' by SANA's chairman, Professor Michael Pentz, dean of science at the Open University. 'If the Russians take the trouble to fly over Bri-

tain, they are not going to drop a few tons of high explosives and go away. They are going to give us everything they have got,' he said.

'Britain would have 40 million dead and another five million injured — and that takes no account of a nuclear winter. It would just blot out the survivors. It makes a nonsense of the Government's strategy.'

Britain's nuclear defence plans are outlined in a newly published 26-chapter report, circulated to local authorities. It contains only one sentence that refers indirectly to the dangers of nuclear winters. The rest details emergency duties — such as maintenance of power, food, medical supplies and civil control — that the Government demands of local authorities.

According to the nuclear winter theory — which was first publicly aired by scientists, including Professor Carl Sagan, a year ago this weekend — such provisions are utterly useless.

Dr Alan Longman, a biologist at Edinburgh University, dismissed suggestions that the tour was politically motivated.

'I helped arrange a conference last month on "Farming and the Nuclear Winter" and we had a great many Border farmers attending,' he said. 'By no stretch of the imagination could they be called hot-headed radicals.'

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