



# Information sheet 1

ONE: THE MYTH OF  
CIVIL DEFENCE

## THE MYTH OF CIVIL DEFENCE

CIVIL DEFENCE against nuclear attack means dealing with three problems: *protection against the immediate effects; protection against fallout; providing and restoring essential services after the attack.*

### *Protection against immediate effects*

Protection against heat and blast means either providing *shelters* or moving the population out of likely target areas, i.e. *evacuation*. Current planning in this country is to do *neither* of these things. There will be no publicly provided shelters; and not only does the Government have no plan for evacuation, it intends to seal off main roads and railways if war looks imminent, to stop people evacuating themselves.

### *What could be done?*

*Shelters* could give quite a lot of protection if properly constructed. But they would have to have food, water and sanitation, since people within range of the immediate effects of a nuclear explosion would have to stay in shelters at least for several days. There would have to be a lot of *public shelters*, since the warning-time, if any, would be short, and it is not possible to get large number of people through a door quickly. The only way large numbers of shelters could be provided would be to insist on including *shelters in all new housing*: this would have little effect in the next few years, and would add substantially to the cost of building houses, especially for flats. *Purpose-built private shelters* are a possibility only for the rich if they are to protect against blast; the *makeshift shelters* described in the Government's booklet *Domestic Nuclear Shelters* offer no protection worth speaking of against blast, as they will, on the Government's own figures, collapse at distances from an explosion where ordinary houses would be comparatively undamaged.

*Evacuation* could only be partial, even if there was enough warning time, as many people would have to stay in their jobs if the evacuation were to be workable. Because of the dangers from fallout evacuees would need shelter with food, water and

sanitation. These could themselves become targets, whether they were set up in open countryside or in towns and cities not expected to be targets. Evacuation would also be impossible to conceal, and might itself be taken as a sign that this country intended to *begin* a war.

*Rescue measures* for those within a fire and blast zone could only be very limited. After a groundburst, fallout would stop anything being done except self-help. After an airburst, rescue might be possible for a few hours: but no planning could cope with the likely problems: at Hiroshima nearly 80% of the city's fire-brigade was put out of action. Fire and ambulance stations and hospitals are as likely to be destroyed, damaged or contaminated as anywhere else; a recent study by Cambridge County Council estimated that medical supplies would be exhausted within a few hours of a nuclear attack.

CONCLUSION: *Even if there was some warning that a war is near, and some warning of the actual attack, little can be done for those within the zone of fire and blast.*

### *Protection against fallout*

This can be given to *some extent* by sheltering. Radiation can be shielded against, and even an intact ordinary house will give some protection against radiation compared with the effects which would be experienced outside it.

With some precautions a house can provide enough protection to reduce the level of radiation inside to about one-tenth of that outside; a makeshift shelter can reduce the level to a fortieth; and even higher levels of protection can be given by purpose-built shelters. Current planning in this country is *not to provide public fallout shelters*, but to encourage individual households to be prepared to build makeshift shelters. Provided there is a period of build-up to war (current civil defence planning allows for 36 hour warning), programmes will be broadcast giving advice on protective measures against radiation. A national warning system exists to give warning of fallout, which *may* work in areas not heavily damaged, and there is a programme to train

volunteers in the use of radiation meters.

### *What could be done?*

Not a great deal more. It would not be practicable to provide public fallout shelters on the scale required, especially as they would need to be stocked with fuel, water, food and sanitary facilities. Nor would it be easy for most households to build even the makeshift shelters described in *Domestic Nuclear Shelters*. If *half* the households in a town, say, the size of Exeter built such makeshift wood/earth shelters in their back gardens this would require 122 miles of 2"x4" timber, 2 million nails, and about 900 thousand square yards of heavy-duty polythene. The cost, including stocks of food, water and other essential supplies, would be of the order of £2-300 for a family of four, *assuming that prices stayed stable*. If there really were only 36 hours' warning, it would often be impossible to erect such shelters in time, even if the household had bought in all its supplies in advance; and the position would be little better if the period of warning were longer. Not only do most shops and warehouses not carry more than a week or two of stocks for normal requirements, which would be quite insufficient to meet the demand, there would certainly be panic buying. In any case, the Government intends to seal off roads and railways for all except 'essential' traffic; supplies of the things needed to build and stock even makeshift shelters would run out quickly in the period before war began and could not be made good.

Even those who were able by sheltering to protect themselves against receiving a *lethal* dose of radiation would not necessarily be able to avoid a *sublethal* dose — one which might have effects on their health ranging from mild to severe. Moreover, sooner or later they would have to emerge from their shelters, and, if they had been in an area where shelters were needed, would still be exposed to significant levels of radiation for two or three months at least. *The total dose they received, in and out of shelter, during the first three months after a nuclear attack, might not be enough to kill them; but it would certainly*

reduce their chances of survival.

CONCLUSION: *Some protection against fallout can be achieved. But whether or not there were a substantial period of warning before the outbreak of a nuclear war there would be no possibility of providing such protection for a very large part of the population.* Even those who did manage to find effective shelters could not escape the effects of radiation completely.

#### *The survival of society*

The society we live in is a very complex one; it is vulnerable to the breakdown even of small parts of it, as has been shown by natural disasters and strikes affecting essential services in recent years. We all specialize. Few of us grow our own food; most of us live in towns or cities, where supplies of the things we need are brought to us. All of us depend heavily on essentials such as housing, transport, electricity, water, sewerage, gas. We are also protected against disease by very high standards of sanitation and health care. Most of us have no natural immunity against a number of diseases, especially the water-borne ones: cholera, typhoid and dysentery.

HEALTH – there will be little provision for those directly affected by the attack. Current planning is for survivors to be divided into three groups: those too badly injured to recover with the available medical treatment; those who will survive without medical attention; and those who can be helped by available simple treatment. *Only the third group will receive any treatment.* Those who are too badly injured will be allowed to die, without even pain-killers, as there will not be enough of these to go round. Those who are 'only' suffering from radiation sickness will not receive treatment, as there is *no known cure*. Troops and police will guard surviving hospitals and medical centres against attacks by those refused treatment.

Even those still alive after the first three months will find survival a risky business. The main killers are likely to be cholera, typhoid and dysentery; influenza; tuberculosis; and poliomyelitis. There are no large stocks of vaccines against these diseases, and it is unlikely that it will be possible to manufacture them in the post-attack world. Not only will the survivors have little natural immunity, their resistance will also be weakened by sublethal doses of radiation and shortage of food, water and fuel.

Government plans do not offer

any protection; there are some stockpiles of basic drugs (morphine, aspirin and penicillin), but even these may not be accessible after an attack. Trained medical staff are as likely to be killed in an attack as anyone else.

FOOD – this will be scarce at best. There are some stockpiles, but they are held in ordinary warehouses and many of them will have been destroyed or contaminated by the attack. Much would depend on the time of year – growing crops might be fit for consumption, but distributing them would be difficult, and it would be still more difficult to keep back sufficient stocks for growing next year's crops.

WATER – in most parts of the country, supplies of water depend on electricity, which is unlikely to be available. The Department of the Environment does keep some emergency pumps and purifying plants, but not on a scale to cope with a breakdown of supplies over most of the country. Most survivors will have to drink water contaminated by radioactivity and disease.

FUEL – any likely pattern of nuclear attack would destroy refineries and stockpiles of oil products, as these are supplies of military importance. Coal mines might survive intact – but they too depend on electricity to work them, to say nothing of the skilled manpower. It is pretty certain that most households would be cut off from supplies of fuel for transport and heating. This would prevent their going far to get supplies. It would also mean that many survivors would die of exposure – most parts of this country are uninhabitable in the winter months without heating.

The social consequences of these and other effects of nuclear attack are not hard to predict. *There would be a breakdown not just of 'law and order' but of all our social values and behaviour.* This is borne out by the experience of other crises and disasters – earthquakes, floods, past wars. Survival might be possible for a few, but they would not survive in a social sense but as individuals, and *the ones who did survive would be those prepared to be completely ruthless about getting their way.*

*What does Government civil defence planning really mean?*

What has been said above has suggested that no real planning for the effects of a nuclear attack or reconstructing a workable or worthwhile society after a nuclear

attack can be done. Government circulars and civil defence exercises in effect admit this. Within three days of the start of one civil defence exercise in 1978, troops and police were supposed to have been issued with CS gas 'to keep order'.

Journalists visiting civil defence control bunkers during the 'Operation Square Leg' exercise in September 1980 found them in a state of disrepair; this fits with the evidence given above that no serious attempt is being made – or can be made – to prepare to administer the surviving civilian population. Civil defence measures – County Emergency Officers, booklets like *Protect and Survive*, Parish War Emergency Plans – might have some value in the event of a 'limited' nuclear war, that is itself frightening.

It is more likely that these preparations are meant to reassure the public, worried by increased preparations for nuclear war, that *something* is being done to protect us.

What these preparations also do is to disguise an area of civil defence which has not been given much publicity – civil defence as *defence against civilians*. Restricted plans leaked after 'Operation Square Leg' showed that troops were to be used in the following ways: *maintenance of law and order; 'control of selfish and disgruntled minorities'; support and protection for special courts and execution of sentences; guards for convoys, key points, bunkers and VIPs; guards on internment areas.* The 'scenario' for Square Leg included the use of troops *before* the outbreak of war to control crowds and round up 'subversives' (meaning, apparently, anyone who might not want to die in a nuclear war and said so). These preparations are intended to protect the government in the period leading up to a nuclear war and during the war itself; to enable it to go to war insulated from any pressures its voters and citizens might want to bring against it. They are meant to give 'credibility' to our 'deterrent' by showing the world that our government can use it without anyone in Britain being able to do anything about it. This is the *main* purpose of Government plans for civil defence – any protection for the civilian population is purely incidental.

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## INFORMATION:

## Civil Defence

Ask someone in the street what civil defence is about and they will tell you it is about shelters, rationing, first-aid posts and other means to alleviate the suffering of the general public in time of war. Ask them if that is what present civil defence is all about and it is likely they will say yes.

What is apparent to the casual observer is the acceptable face of civil defence. The world of *Protect and Survive*, inner refuges and jolly sing-songs in the underground while the bombs drop outside. The unacceptable face of civil defence is only seen by those who look closer — a world of military government, mega-deaths, hunger and disease.

This introduction to civil defence aims to present the facts about civil defence, the face of Janus the government wishes us to see, and the face it wishes us not to see.

### The Acceptable Face

In time of war the government depends upon "in-place sheltering" for the protection of the civilian population against blast and fallout. To this end it plans, in the fortnight before the war, to issue every household with a copy of *Protect and Survive*, which tells the reader "how to make your home and family as safe as possible under nuclear attack". This pamphlet will be augmented by mass propaganda on the radio, television and in newspapers.

*Protect and Survive* tells you to choose a fall-out room and in it construct an inner refuge of doors leant against a wall, or alternatively one can hide under the table, after having covered it in books and sandbags for further protection. Into your fall-out room, as well as your family, you must take water, food and fuel for fourteen days, radio, first aid kit, portable toilet, warm clothing, toys, books a box of dry sand and a calendar — among other things. A supply of thick plastic bags is also useful in case someone dies in the shelter, after being labelled, the corpse should be placed in the bag, securely tied and labelled again.

After fourteen days in the fall-out room the survivors should hear the all-clear signal 'this means there is no longer an immediate danger from air attack and fall-out and you may resume normal activities'.

The face of nuclear war presented to the public by *Protect and Survive*, is one of cosy conviviality under the kitchen table. A sort of game of make believe camping without going outdoors, a fortnight off work and then it will be a return to normal.

The government, however, *does not believe that this is what a nuclear war will be like*, and its own, less advertised, plans reflect this fact. What, then, is the purpose of *Protect and Survive*? The conclusion must be that the government wishes people's anxieties about nuclear war to be calmed, they want to make war seem more cosy and survivable. If this is achieved they will have less anxiety about public opposition to the use of nuclear weapons, which makes their use *more likely*, those in government, as we shall see, have little to fear from the consequences of nuclear war.

### The Un-acceptable Face

**GOVERNMENT BUNKERS.** The government spends £45 million each year on civil defence, a large proportion of which goes towards maintaining a net-

work of bunkers and communications systems. The network of bunkers forms two functions: information gathering and decision making.

The information gathering system consists of 873 six-man bunkers manned by volunteers of the Royal Observer Corps (ROC), their duty is to gather information about bomb explosions and fall-out. The material thus gathered is passed on to 25 group controls who analyse the information before passing it on to the United Kingdom Warning and Monitoring Organisation (UKWMO) who control air-raid sirens nationwide and have contact with the ruling authorities.

The command structure consists of approximately 36 large bunkers, which are blast and radiation resistant, and contain essential supplies sufficient for the occupants for up to a month. Below these in the structure are a series of small operations rooms and bunkers.

At the top of the structure is the National Seat of Government (NSG) and HQ of UK land forces, beneath this are ten Regional Headquarters (RHQ) which in turn have Sub-Regional Headquarters (SRHQ), County and District Headquarters below them. The chain of command and communications is so connected that if one link in the chain is destroyed the bunkers above and below in the hierarchy can carry out the functions of the destroyed element. The whole system would employ some 20,000 civil servants, the average manpower of a RHQ ranging from 200-400 people.

Each region is headed by a Regional Commissioner who is an appointed government minister, a Regional Military Commander and Regional Police Commander, in theory all three men rule together, in practice it would be quite different. The United Kingdom Commanders-in-Chief Committee (UKCICC) have military representatives at every level of the civil defence establishment, plus their own chain of command posts. The military alone, plus the police in certain places, have communications equipment. This means that the military will effectively have control of post-attack Britain. When questioned about this Air Vice-Marshal Sir Leslie Mavor, former principle of the Home Defence College, agreed this would be the case, and added: "We just have to ask the Generals to be good boys . . ."

In addition to the bunkers and communications network the Home Office has a network of supply and transport stores containing items from sand bags to riot gas. The Ministry of Agriculture has a number of Food Buffer Depots which will make some food available to the survivors of a nuclear war. Your local Food Buffer Depot location may be found by looking in Yellow Pages, which may have it listed under Warehouseman or Wharfinger.

*Pre-War Civil Defence Measures.* We have seen how the government has prepared for nuclear war, we shall now turn to look at how the government believes civil defence would function leading up to, during and after a war. The material given in this section is from Exercise Square Leg, which was a civil defence exercise carried out in 1980.

One month before the outbreak of war, dissident elements are interned. The army is called in to assist the police in maintaining law and order.

Six days before the war some police are armed. Restrictions are imposed on most major roads including

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motorways. The Emergency Service Routes (ESRs) are made available only to military and other essential traffic. Civilians are left to use minor roads as best they can. The telephone service is also commandeered, only selected essential phone users may make phone calls, although everyone can still receive incoming messages. Petrol and food is rationed.

Four days before the war, emergency services are removed from likely target areas so as to be available after a nuclear attack. The police and army are used to prevent people from leaving areas deemed likely to be attacked.

In Exercise Square Leg the unacceptable face of civil defence begins to become clear. The government are using the army and police *against* the population in order to ensure the survival of government structures, rather than to ensure the survival of the population.

## Nuclear Attack

In *Protect and Survive* the families hiding under their tables are instructed: 'Listen to your radio for information about the services and facilities as they become available'. Home Office internal circulars of the last decade make it clear about when and which services will become available. For the people cowering under their tables, or those trapped in the radioactive wreckage of their homes, the information contained in the circulars would not be good news.

The fire service will not be coming to their aid: 'It is envisaged that . . . fire fighting would be only undertaken when the return was judged worthwhile . . . Planning should therefore be directed towards the preservation of the fire service for its role in the longer survival period'. (ES5/1974 *War Emergency Planning for the Fire Service*).

The Health Services will not look for casualties: 'It would be essential that staff . . . should not be wasted by allowing them to enter areas of high radioactivity and no staff should leave shelter until authorised to do so'. Even assuming that you can find a hospital, they may not treat you: '. . . hospitals should . . . accept only those casualties who, after limited surgical procedures, would be likely to be alive after seven days . . . The more complete the recovery that can be expected, the higher the priority for admission . . .' (ES1/1977 *The Preparation and Organisation of the Health Service for War*).

If you are without water, too bad: 'Human survivors . . . should be deemed to have access to sufficient water to keep them alive for fourteen days'. (ES6/1976 *Water Services in War*). If what you do have is contaminated, then you will have to risk drinking it.

*Civil defence planning policy for the days immediately following a nuclear strike is clear. You are on your own.*

## Post attack civil defence

Civil defence plans, we can see, do not intend to help the victims of blast and fire which will surround the 200 megatons of nuclear weapons which the Home Office expects to be dropped on this country. Tens of millions will have been abandoned to meet their deaths from fire, radiation and blast. What of the future? The Home Office have clear plans for that too.

We are told that we have nuclear weapons to defend

our democratic institutions and freedom from totalitarian governments. Home Office circulars indicate that millions will have died in vain, democracy will have fled from the country, arbitrary government will exist without it having been imposed from without. 'Post-attack decisions . . . should not be compared with the more deliberate . . . peace time planning . . . The urgent decisions of the County Controller would be arbitrary and, to some people, would appear harsh and inequitable'. (ES7/1973 *Machinery of Government in War*).

The controller would be empowered by the Emergency Powers Acts of 1939 and 1940 to 'make any regulations he thinks fit to secure public safety, supplies, the defence of the realm and the maintenance of public order'. Justice would be harsh and swift: 'penalties such as probation, fines or imprisonment would no longer be effective . . . in the case of flagrantly anti-social behaviour there might be a need for harsher penalties than are generally acceptable in peace time'. (ES3/1979 *Briefing Material for War Time Controllers*).

Law and order may be maintained by draconian measures, but what of other necessities of life, of food and warmth? Agriculture would be placed under the control of government agriculture officers who would aim at reorientating farming towards the production of subsistence crops, particularly cereals. What food is available would be communally cooked and distributed, rather than attempting to re-establish a rationing system. (ES1/1979 *Food and Agriculture Controls in War*).

Energy supplies, which are particularly important for quick recovery will be scarce or non-existent: 'After a significant nuclear attack . . . energy production everywhere would be considerably reduced and may be brought to a halt'. (ES5/1976 *Energy Supplies in War*).

## Conclusions

Home Office civil defence circulars make gloomy reading, but they do show the reality of civil defence in the face of nuclear attack. Civil defence is a myth. What it can do is offer some advice on protection from fallout for those who live away from likely targets and may therefore escape the blast and heat effects of nuclear weapons. It can also protect the government and its means of decision making and law enforcement.

What civil defence *cannot* do is protect the tens of millions who would suffer the direct effects of a nuclear attack. It cannot offer protection to industry or agriculture upon which we depend for our survival and well-being. Civil defence cannot offer protection against cancer-producing low level radiation which would exist for decades following an attack. In short, civil defence offers no defence against nuclear weapons.

If civil defence is so useless why is the government spending £45 million on it each year? We are forced to conclude that our earlier findings are correct. Civil defence is to protect the government and not the people who it serves. 'Protect and Survive' and similar pamphlets are meant to calm their readers — to give the impression that nuclear war is 'not so bad after all' and is survivable. If people think they will survive they are more likely to give their support to the use of nuclear weapons in a time of crisis. Such an attitude makes the use of nuclear weapons more likely. It could be argued, therefore, that far from adding to Britain's deterrence capability, civil defence is actually a destabilising factor in the arms race.