

MP claims CD documents are 'a sick joke'

By CHRIS MULLINGER

The Government yesterday published an updated series of documents in its controversial campaign to force local authorities to draw up Civil Defence plans for conventional and nuclear war.

But the documents — one admitting that Britain's health service could not cope with the aftermath of a major nuclear attack — were immediately condemned as either misleading or naive.

Mr John Home Robertson, Labour MP for East Lothian, described them as a "sick joke".

One of the documents — entitled *Civil Defence and the Farmer* — ignores the "nuclear winter" theory which suggests that the effects of prolonged darkness and extreme cold caused by a nuclear conflict would wipe out agricultural production.

The departments charged with releasing the documents were unusually coy about making them available by ignoring

the normal methods of distributing Government publications to the Press and providing copies only to those who requested them.

The Home Office, the Scottish Office, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of Health were all involved in drawing up the documents, which are based on the Government's contention that effective Civil Defence measures can save lives in a nuclear war in Europe.

They include emergency planning guidance to local authorities, a technical handbook on how local councils can identify "communal shelters" for the public against radiation, a training manual for Civil Defence volunteers, an information booklet on the UK Warning and Monitoring Organisation, guidance on living under fallout conditions, a consultative document for health authorities, and three *Civil Defence and the Farmers* booklet.

Only the consultative document sent out to health authorities takes a pessimistic view of the effects of a nuclear attack on Britain.

It admits that survivors could be left untreated by professional medical staff because of the high radiation risk with help coming only from volunteers.

The British Medical Association, which in 1983 severely criticised Civil Defence plans, said last night that the Government had for the first time recognised the major difference between planning for a conventional attack and for a nuclear attack.

Nevertheless, the document calls on health authorities to be ready to put its war plans into action within a week and to make some moves, including freeing as many hospital beds as possible and equipping extra emergency centres, within 48 hours of a period of tension. But it adds: "At worst, the

numbers of casualties in parts of the country will be quite beyond the resources of existing health services. Hospitals might be isolated or destroyed and the care of casualties might have to be undertaken largely by volunteers working in the community under professional supervision."

But it was the *Civil Defence and the Farmer* booklet which drew the strongest attacks last night. It attempts to explain to farmers the effects of nuclear explosions and radioactive fallout, how to provide shelters for animals, when to graze animals after an attack and how to deal with crops contaminated by radioactive fallout.

Mr Home Robertson, a Labour spokesman on agriculture, said: "It is malicious mischief for the Government to try to kid people that agricultural culture or any other industry would survive the devastation of a nuclear conflict."

Mr Home Robertson and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament pointed to the booklet's failure to consider the effects of a "nuclear winter" particularly only weeks before the International Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment (SCOPE) completes its thesis on the subject.

"It is likely that SCOPE will endorse the projection that even relatively small-scale nuclear conflict could create atmospheric conditions of prolonged darkness and extreme cold," Mr Home Robertson said. The booklet's failure to consider the subject made the Government's *Civil Defence* plans a "sick joke," he added.

The documents aimed at local authorities are likely to draw the greatest flak from the large number of Labour-controlled councils in the UK opposed to making Civil Defence plans.

In 1983 the Government passed legislation to force recalcitrant Labour councils — led notably by Lothian Regional Council in Scotland

and Lambeth in London — to introduce plans.

Last night Mr Duncan Campbell, author of the 1982 book *War Plan UK* which exposed the inadequacies of Britain's Civil Defence plans, claimed that the way the latest documents had been released was designed to silence Press criticism of the questionable material they contained.

"From my inside sources I have learned that this is called the 'tranche policy,'" he added. "It is an idea the Government devised on the basis that if it had six questionable publications they would all be let out on a Friday with limited copies to the Press."

Mr Campbell, a journalist on the *New Statesman* magazine, has seen some of the latest documents in their draft form, and says: "What is noticeably missing from this latest tranche is an attempt to replace the now notorious *Protect and Survive* pamphlet which has become the joke book of people such as myself and the disarmament movement."

CIVIL DEFENCE

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