

CIVIL DEFENCE

From a pacifist point of view, 'civil defence' should be a Godsend. Non-aggressive, unarmed, devoted to the preservation, as opposed to the destruction of life. Also, with its emphasis on community and parish level organisation, it could be the paradigm example of anti-hierarchy self-help politics. And last, but not least, it would have to be a major factor in any civilian defence policy. Unfortunately, allied to 20th century nuclear weapons and 12th century 'defence' thinking, 'civil defence' is the poorest and least important of relations. This is understandable. Consider: if nuclear weapons are used then deterrence has failed, that is, defence has failed, and that the defenders/defended become expendable according to the rules of the idiocy of war.

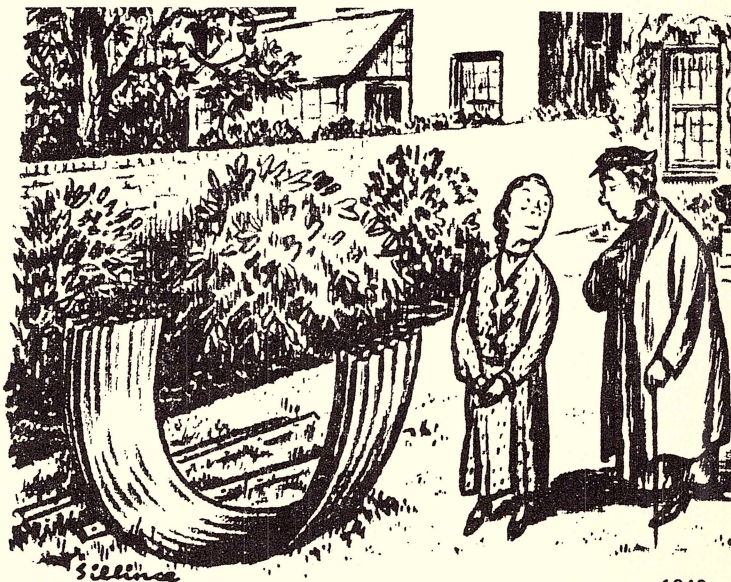
So the current 'civil defence' strategy, piecemeal and derisory as it is, deservedly receives the contempt heaped upon it by thinking people. If a nuclear war is fought when the government will admit the failure of nuclear deterrence and say to the people: "Look, we got you into this mess - now get yourselves out of it". (And as if from the bottom of their hearts, these doyens of market forces will probably send you, up through their ventilation shafts and airlocks, a dozen back numbers of "Protest and Survive Monthly", the concrete manufacturers assport to a fast buck, or should that read 'quick kill'?)

Clearly, 'civil defence' is a misnomer. But it has not always been so. During World War II, the CD Corps-recruited at street level - had the makings of a genuinely compassionate civilian service, even though its role, overall, must be seen as having been somewhat negative, inasmuch as it was the adjunct not of civilian, but military defence. At least, its aims and roots could be identified, along with its obvious benefits. Every street would have its CD member, through whom rescue services and assistance could be summoned, whilst at the same time, being local, could ensure that the trust of the residents could be maintained on a neighbourhood basis. This concern to preserve a 'self-help', neighbourhood image lasted until 1968 (when the CD Corps met their end), at long before then, since the dawn of the nuclear age, it had become obvious that it was quite beyond the powers of tin helmeted

men with stirrup pumps to alleviate the horrors of nuclear war.

It was not an act of honesty that hastened the run-down of CD in those days, but merely a cost cutting exercise, in a period of relaxed international relations. Now that the hawks are in the ascendancy again (nothing like domestic politics to sharpen their claws) we find that our 'tuppence ha'penny' civil defence, and the government contract tins of Brasso are also out again, this time polishing that 25 year old myth about us all surviving a nuclear war. Is there to be no end to this charade? Are we to be continually entreated by jolly ex-Group Captains, ensconced in their bunkers, into believing that they even know what they are doing, much less that they could actually succeed?

Up until early in 1980 CD merited hardly a mention in the press, but in that year, after Afghanistan and as if to soften us up for something worse, an avalanche of articles appeared. But despite this coverage the notion of civil defence as presently mooted, not surprisingly has made very little impact on the public. People will remain until the last possible moment blissfully ignorant of the warnings that sirens will wail around the countryside. (1). One reason why this need not surprise us is because the majority of people still believe that after a nuclear war there will be no survivors at all, not even a living thing. This is a fallacy but then on the other hand, another reason for peoples apathy, if not ignorance is that they know government estimates of survival rates to be equally fallacious, and delib-



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"It was delivered here months ago—but I really don't know what I'm meant to do with it if the Germans come over."

My research over the last two and a half years convince me that the state of civil defence rightly earns the criticism, harsh criticism too, it receives. But beyond that, it offers a lesson to pacifists, in that if we are to offer alternatives to the defence we are currently accustomed to (or rather, have forced upon us), we must recognise that civil defence would have to be an integral part of any such alternative. So whilst I would agree with all the justifiable abuse present day civil defence gets (for one thing, it might stir the bunker inhabitants from their endemic complacency), I also think that we should challenge our own assumptions about any value CD has in other contexts.

ately so. Naturally, people living in remote western areas, for example, may escape the holocaust relatively unharmed. And elsewhere, certain areas may avoid some, if not all, of the direct destruction. But what is clear is that the government's policy insists that the majority of the population, living in urban areas, should stay where they are, and various measures will be taken to make sure they do so. As a nuclear attack on our cities is most likely, the consequences of this policy become starkly apparent. The government could take measures to provide for urban refugees, of course, many moons ago, in the "War Game" days, it did. But one has to

admit that that option as shown in the film was hardly less miserable. The current policy will clearly be cheaper to implement however; dead people require less attention than the living and that perhaps is the only lesson the government has learnt from the "War Game". It is obvious that from a logistical point of view having a lot of people die in one place is better than having a few die here, a few die there and some somewhere else. Preparing mass graves, burning bodies and of course collecting them, these are all hazardous tasks, and it may be that deep in the subconscious memories of the Whitehall autocrats there stirs a recollection of the Black Death, except 'villages' become 'cities' in which the cry 'bring out your dead' resounds. And as in medieval times, will there be any certainty that the bodies heaped on the carts will all be dead? How many doctors will be on the carts themselves? Nobody really knows. But the government will be well placed to assuage your fears about this and other aspects of the post-attack environment. Can't you imagine it now - Maggie Thatcher, Roy Jenkins or even who knows, Michael Foot - supplying the rhetoric to cheer you up in your decimated existence whilst they breathe the filtered air of some deep bunker.

After the war the division between rulers and the ruled will never be more apparent, a situation made possible by present CD plans. What's left of the communications will be used to direct the 'nation' from the labyrinth system of shelters the government has built for itself over the years.

This brings me to the principle question that should arise in any discussion of civil defence, that is, what is the nation, what is it that must be preserved? Civil defence now, if it were a reliable guide to the value of the United Kingdom as an entity, would point to the monarchy, politicians, top civil servants and art treasures as constituting the whole of that entity. Like some artefacts buried in the ground, these things when brought to the light of day mean to ensure that the 'nation' as a vehicle for some worthy heritage, will last eternal. Civil defence then, and this is hardly more than a commonplace statement, reveals how expendable people are when a particular political stance is adopted. It is like the 'good old days', when shedding blood to protect the 'flag' was the ultimate experience in selfless courage, except that now, of course, the shedding of blood will be so profuse as to make the flag a quite empty symbol in any case.

Not so in Sweden and Switzerland, though. These neutrals have wedded

civil defence to civilian defence, they have recognised that all are defenders and are the chief things to be defended, that is, life itself is the thing to be valued.

Thus people (and I am not saying this is a pacifist solution) participate in protecting themselves directly, they are what they are fighting for. Consequently, they have no need of mass annihilation weapons, they have no need to station their troops in other countries. As much of their defence as possible is passive in nature. This contrasts with the British defence stance which resembles an old man carrying a gun, an old man who must always live in fear that somebody will call his bluff. Not so the neutrals, Sweden and Switzerland. They more resemble the 'pillow', no matter how much you punch it, it will always 'come back' in some other quarter. There does appear, to pacifists, a high price to pay for such armed neutralism - conscription. Is it the only alternative to high-technology defence? Civilian defence is defined by mass mobilisation against the aggressor, it cannot operate without the support of a majority of the civil population in pursuing tactics which perhaps inevitably may lead to casualties. Also, the adoption of a civilian defence policy does not guarantee that any aggressor will not use

nuclear weapons against you. A neutral Great Britain, for example, could be attacked by either the Russians or the Americans, to prevent its facilities falling into the other hands. Sweden knows as much and her military exercises are geared to meeting a threat from East or West.

What is clear is that CD without civilian defence is an empty concept. It is not something that can be carried through if the population does not recognise its value, which clearly, at the moment, for obvious reasons, it does not. It is perfectly evident that civil defence is solely concerned with protecting the people who have their fingers on the high technology and maintaining the supply routes for the envisaged battle on the continent. It should be a priority for all pacifists and unilateralists to hasten the demise of our current civil defence system. To quote from my own publication "Civil defence in Humberside", "If that structure were to be weakened it would surely leave any government more open to the mercy of the people, not a bad thing in a 'democracy'".

(1) *Yorkshire Post "County Ignores Nuclear Warning" 19.9.81*

Colin Challen.

ON THE WARPATH

* Members were told of a meeting at Kirkby Malzeard, scheduled for Wednesday, about what to do in the event of a nuclear war. It was reported that the swings were in order and the bus shelter was discussed.

Darlington & Stockton Times

* Mr Hale Meserow said that council has based its decision on the belief that world peace was not an issue specifically relevant to the people of Caulfield.

Melbourne Chadstone Progress

* "There's not much point in spending money on education or social services if you're run from the Kremlin, is there?"

John Nott Secretary of State for Defence, interviewed in Kuala Lumpur on The World This Weekend programme on ITV

* The wives' great compensation was their pride in their husband 'A man in his uniform is the handsomest sight there is... I feel proud of my husband all the time... I hang on to thing when he goes. I used to take a jacket and crumple it into a little ball and tuck it in beside me so that it felt like he was there.... I think he's fighting for England.... When he's got that uniform on, I think: "God, he's British and he's proud of it." And when he walks down the street, he hold his head up.... We're in a man's world. I never resent it. I knew he was going to join the Army and I joined him. I always believe a woman should follow her man...'

BBC Radio 4 programme 'Our Regiment'

* Space has become an extension of the Earth battlefield. Soon it will dominate that battlefield - as it now controls America's strategic peace keeping potential.

From The Shape of Wars to Come by David Baker

► Contributions to this column are welcome. Please send original cuttings or photocopies when possible.