

# 'OSTRICH POSE' PROVEN WRONG

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7.3.86

**A £500,000 international scientific study of what would happen to London in war was published this week. DUNCAN CAMPBELL reports on the significance of the GLC's Greater London Area War Risk Study ('GLAWARS') in the struggle between 'nuclear free' local authorities and the Home Office**

THE GLAWARS REPORT\* is the most detailed and comprehensive study ever mounted on the likely effects of war on a large modern city. Written by a team of international experts, it is a powerful indictment of current British government civil defence policy.

The GLAWARS Commission was wholly independent of the GLC. The government offered the Commissioners only studied non co-operation. Home Office officials even told a director of the Polytechnic of the South Bank (which was responsible for the academic independence of GLAWARS) that they intended to 'avoid anything which appeared to endorse' the needs of local authorities to have realistic planning assumptions on which to base civil defence plans.

Reassuringly, the report assesses the threat of war 'during the next few years' as low. But a 'war scare', which might be economically destructive, was more likely than actual hostilities against civilians.

The 'most likely' course of a future war for London was conventional attack followed by the use of nuclear weapons. Thereafter, any 'attempts to restrict [the use of nuclear weapons] to military targets would be likely to fail', and 'the temptation to depart from planned strategies and to release an orgy of

destruction would be high'. 'Should this happen', the report concludes, 'London would be destroyed'. Such an attack would kill up to 97 per cent of Londoners, and 'even a much less severe attack . . . would destroy about one third of the city.' In these circumstances, the reports concludes that 'all forms of civil defence would be useless'.

GLAWARS considered that British civil defence planning was crippled by the government's intentionally misleading guidance to the public. An opinion survey taken last year indicated that, in the event of war, 'about two thirds of Londoners would be disposed to join mass demonstrations against UK involvement'. One quarter of those interviewed said they would contemplate direct action to stop a war, while 12 per cent would consider 'violent methods of protest'. The government's hope that Londoners would be willing to stay and carry out their civil defence plans was contradicted by the survey's finding that, once a war scare started, two thirds of emergency service workers would not report for work. Some 35 per cent of Londoners would leave town and: 'The city would effectively be paralysed even before any attack against it was launched.'

GLAWARS was commissioned because of the Home Office's longstanding policy of keeping its head firmly planted in the sand where 'war risks' are concerned. In 1982, when the Home Office cancelled the civil defence exercise 'Hard Rock', the official line was that cancellation was necessary because nuclear free authorities would not play. In fact Ministers had tampered so extensively with the assumptions on which the exercise was based that it became totally unrealistic.

The last straw was when a junior minister told officials that, as well as removing all nuclear and US bases from the Soviet 'target' list and insisting that all cities be 'missed', nuclear attacks should omit all Conservative marginal constituencies. At this point, even the government's own civil defence planners threw in the towel.

The Home Office refuses to provide local authorities with 'realistic' planning assumptions for nuclear civil defence, so more authorities are following the GLC's lead and commissioning their own planning studies.

GLAWARS come to the major conclusion that the Home Office policy of 'flexible planning' is an 'essentially unworkable philosophy'. They say that it is absurd for the Home Office to claim to be unable to identify

## The story so far — and why I got out

UNDER THE SHADOW of abolition, the GLC could only pass GLAWARS on to its successor — a new 'qualgo' (quasi autonomous local government organisation), the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority (LFCDA). GLAWARS says firmly that the new authority should give no further consideration to civil defence measures to deal with a major nuclear attack and 'restrict its civil defence planning' accordingly.

It does say that certain kinds of civil defence planning might be effective, in a limited way, in the case of other (improbable) types of attack. Such observations, quoted selectively, might be held to justify Home Office civil defence policy. This possibility caused such discomfort inside some parts of the GLC that during January some members and officials tried to have the GLAWARS report altered. When GLAWARS staff refused to consider these approaches, officials working in the GLC's Nuclear Policy Unit asked other nuclear free local authorities to campaign with them to 'suppress' the GLAWARS report.

The NFZ authorities' National Steering Committee rejected such a campaign, 'welcomed the report', and this week 'applauded' the GLC for setting up GLAWARS. It 'will assist other NFZ authorities in their own efforts to obtain detailed planning assumptions information', the committee said.

Home Office Minister Giles Shaw refused this week to take part in a two-way television discussion with the GLAWARS commissioners. The Home Office also ordered its civil defence adviser, Eric Alley, not to appear on a Thames TV programme, after he had agreed to take part. After the GLAWARS report, there can be no dispute that the present basis of government civil defence policy is so fundamentally flawed as to be worthless. The onus is on the government to come clean and face the facts about the risks of war to a nuclear-armed state like Britain.

Duncan Campbell was co-opted as a member of the GLC in 1982, served as the Council's adviser on civil defence policy, and was responsible for commissioning the GLAWARS report. Because of the attempts to interfere with GLAWARS, mentioned above, he resigned from the GLC two weeks ago.

\*The Report of the GLAWARS Commission will be published in May by Basil Blackwell.

### The GLAWARS Commission

**Dr Ann Ehrlich** — Stanford University biologist and nuclear winter specialist

**Dr S William Gunn** — Head of Emergency Relief Operations, World Health Organisation

**Dr Stuart Horner** — British Medical Association Council Member

**Vice-Admiral John M Lee** — former Assistant Director, US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency

**Prof Frank von Hippel** — Princeton University, physicist

**Dr Peter Sharfman** — National Security Program Manager, Office of Technology Assessment, US Congress

**Rapporteur: Robin Clarke** — Senior UNESCO environment consultant

areas of high risk and low risk of damage in the event of attack. Indeed, Whitehall has dispersed command centres and food stores on the basis of such assessments.

Unless the 'flexible planning' policy was abandoned by central government, the Commission reported:

Civil defence in the UK is likely to be of marginal use and its cost effectiveness to remain extremely limited.