

56m ration cards await nuclear

Civil Def / Emerg Power
5 11 86
GU

By Andrew Veitch,
Political Correspondent

The Ministry of Agriculture has printed 56 million ration cards for use after a nuclear war, according to confidential documents passed to the Guardian.

They are stockpiled in depots and will be issued to the public at polling stations. Applicants will be checked against the electoral roll.

Details are contained in war plans drawn by a National Health Service environmental health team on the instructions of the Department of Health and Social Services. They suggest that the Ministry of Agricul-

ture is almost ready to put Britain on a war footing at seven days' notice.

Referring to detailed instructions for issuing ration documents, the plans say: "Work on this is well advanced, as is the preparation of a press statement to announce the introduction of rationing."

The ministry has set up buffer depots consisting of emergency feeding equipment plus critical items such as oils, flour, sugar, fats, yeast, and biscuits, the documents say.

Arrangements have been made "for the dispersal of food stocks from ports and other vulnerable areas, and

it is these which would become the strategic stockpiles."

In a "transition to war" period, the public will be advised to store 14 days supply of food in their homes.

Rationing plans must be capable of being operative within seven days, says the six-man environmental health working group chaired by Dr Joseph Lyons, the retired medical officer for Devon.

Their confidential report, dated October 1986 and entitled Emergency Planning—Environmental Health in Wartime, goes on to describe the Ministry of Agriculture's scheme for food rationing.

"Everyone . . . would be

entitled to a ration card and a form to register with a shopkeeper for rationed goods." Exceptions would be members of the armed forces and people in hospitals, prisons, boarding schools, and old people's homes, where other arrangements would apply.

"The ration cards and registration forms, which have already been printed and distributed to appropriate storage points in the UK, would be supplied to district and London borough councils."

Individuals would get weekly rations for butter, cheese, fat, margarine, and sugar. There would be global rations for tinned, dried,

war

packaged, and bottled foods.

Half of Britain's food is imported, says the report, and radiation would make much of the country's produce inedible.

"However . . . there are sufficient stocks in the distribution pipeline to allow the nation to face an interruption of some weeks with confidence. Whether it is all bought up in 24 hours does not matter, there would still be a few weeks' supply left."

A Ministry of Agriculture spokesman said yesterday: "The ministry does have contingency plans. We do not divulge details of when, how, where, and why for security reasons."

Roll over, Giles!

Home Office Minister Giles Shaw has unveiled a Planned Programme for Implementation of the Civil Defence Regulations 1983 (PPI in the jargon).

The target of this grandly named document is clearly those NFZ local authorities who have been less than enthusiastic in falling in behind the Government's civil defence policy. Just how unenthusiastic becomes evident in the results of a survey of all local authorities' civil defence plans published to coincide with the announcement of the programme.

From these we learn that many of the plans are 'incomplete' and 'contain little or no operational detail and in a number of cases amount to little more than a statement of intent'. Of the 402 District Councils, only 146 have operational emergency control centres, and of 54 County Councils, 20 have failed to set up community advisers schemes.

To stiffen the resolve of these laggardly councils, the Home Office has established a three year rolling programme for implementation of the Regulations. Included in the programme are plans for the construction of 20 bunkers a year and the staging of at least one regional civil defence exercise every year. Those authorities which refuse to comply will suffer the fate of Avon, Mid and South Glamorgan County Councils, which have had their civil defence grants withheld for failing to submit their plans.

It remains to be seen how successful the Home Office will be in forcing councils to adopt its futile civil defence measures. The Regulations have already been around for three years and, as the survey shows, have achieved little. Who knows, in another three years they may have been scrapped entirely.

● Charles Searle

FRONTLINES • FRONTLINES • FRONTLINES

8

Civil Defence Oct 86

'C D'

Paper chains in Whitehall

At the end of February a NATO exercise will be taking place. But it will not be made apparent to the public. Operation Wintex consists of the silent manoeuvre of paper from Whitehall desk to desk, as civil servants play out the roles of Ministers, making decision about 'civil defence' plans in a hypothetical outbreak of war.

The main priority of the plans would be to enable the militia to move swiftly without civilian disturbance. Past Home Office papers on the subject show the first objective of 'Civil defence' plans is to deal with any 'internal threat' to the government. Key roads would be controlled by the police and the telephone network would be withdrawn from 98 per cent

of its subscribers. Even more worrying is the mention of plans to intern 'potential subversives', 20,000 of whom are already estimated to be on MI5 lists.

These procedures do not simply apply to a wartime scenario. They could also be used in a situation of internal strife. The systems which already exist for use in a 'civil emergency' were developed during the 1970s in response to industrial disputes; the Regional Emergency Committees, which would form a key role in the wartime governmental machinery were first set up during the 'winter of discontent' in 1978 to deal with the road haulage strike. The most recent example is the development of

Police Support Units, ostensibly created to be part of a post-attack mobile force but at the moment being used in the miners' strike. The operation will be taking place between February 26th and March 13th, and CND have suggested that the preceding weekend of the 23rd/24th February could be used for campaigning. It is very important that the nature of the operation is brought to the public's attention and material has been produced by CND to help publicise it. For the consequences of Wintex do not only undermine the liberty of the hypothetical subversive; all our lives are bound up in these Whitehall paper chains.

Lizzie Francke