

Council seek guidance on civil defence

On the casting vote of the acting chairman, Skye & Lochalsh District Council agreed this week to ask Highland Region's Emergency Planning Officer to address a seminar on the proposals for dealing with the aftermath of a nuclear strike or other emergency.

The matter arose when the regional emergency planning office asked the district council to accept responsibility for maintaining the switchboard in the civil defence facility at the police station in Portree. The council's expenses would be 100 per cent grant-aided, it was pointed out.

But the council chief executive Mr David Noble said he had explained to the region that no emergency headquarters had yet been designated for Skye & Lochalsh and until this was done the council could not justify maintaining the equipment in the police station. "We need advice from the Emergency Planning Officer on what the requirements are," said Mr Noble.

He suggested that perhaps the council could ask the Emergency Planning Officer to arrange a seminar for councillors on what arrangements Highland Region had.

Councillor Alistair Langlands said: "If we do this we are getting caught up in this rather dangerous game of pretending there is something we can do in the event of a nuclear war." He was supported by cllr Donald Cameron, who said: "This is a load of rubbish and we should take nothing to do with it."

Cllr Langlands seconded by Mr Cameron formally moved that the council take no action on the matter; a counter-motion by cllr George Sutherland was seconded by Mr Murdo James MacLeod. With four votes cast for each motion the acting chairman, Mr Murdo James MacLeod, used his casting vote in support of Messrs Sutherland and MacLeod.

Isle of Wight mass graves plan

Fancy a permanent retirement home on the Isle of Wight?

Mr George Killoran, assistant to the local emergency planning department, has been travelling round the island, looking for post-holocaust mass burial sites. So far he has a nice neat map, marked with 57 likely spots.

Obviously a man in a hurry, he's had to be rather rude to anyone who raises an objection. The vicar of Sandown and the clerk i/c Sandown and Shanklin cemeteries are among those who've been berated as 'one of the loony Left CND mob'. The superintendent of the IOW Crematorium had to point out that a nuclear war might interrupt the gas supply and so put his plant out of action.

But Mr Killoran does have reason to be a bit short-tempered. When he and his boss, Lt Col Appleton, crawl out of their secure bunker, they're likely to have to cope unaided with 120,000 dead local residents, 120,000 dead billeted refugees and, if it's the summer, a large quantity of dead holidaymakers. And he can hardly leave them lying around. So bad for morale, y'know.

● Lionel Trippett

ONTLINES FRONT

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Councils may be forced to draw up war plans

By our Political Staff

Mr Giles Shaw, the junior Home Office minister, last night warned 12 local authorities which have not drawn up emergency plans in preparation for war that the Government will not hesitate to compel compliance.

Mr Shaw told county council emergency planners of a new government approach to emergency planning, in which expertise is built up to cope with all peace and wartime emergencies.

However, he was not seeking to equate peacetime disasters with the scale and horror of nuclear war. He stressed that in any emergency there would be some survivors who could

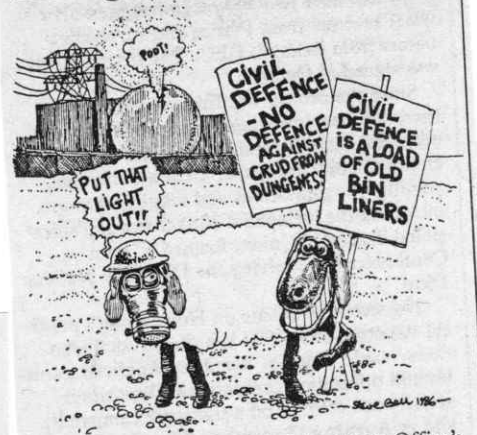
be helped if orderly preparations had been made.

Mr Shaw said he was not looking for confrontation with local authorities which had until now refused to engage in emergency planning, but would prefer to persuade and help them to meet their obligations.

"The legislation does give up powers to compel compliance and let there be no mistake that, if necessary, we shall not hesitate to use them. We cannot accept that any part of this country, whatever its political complexion, should be without the plans and other preparations necessary for its protection in war."

The minister said that the availability of 100 per cent government grants should meet genuine practical difficulties.

War games Dec 86



In the make-believe world of the Home Office's civil defence planners, nuclear war is a strictly taboo subject, not to be mentioned in front of the public. So when they came to devise the scenario for the two regional civil defence exercises being held at the end of November, in the south-east and north-west, they stopped just short of Armageddon.

Instead, the Regional Emergency Committees (RECs) and local Councils in these two regions are being asked to test out their emergency plans for the period of 'international tension' before the outbreak of hostilities and the transition to conventional war.

The fact that this scenario is highly implausible will not worry the Home Office, however. For the real purpose of civil defence is not to mop up after the Bomb has dropped, but to secure the country against the 'internal threat' and to ensure a smooth transition to war.

In this the RECs will play a crucial role. Made up of representatives from Government Departments, the military and the police, they will oversee the enforcement of emergency powers which are already in place on the statute books. These will extend military law, first to areas around vital installations and then to the rest of the country as the crisis deepens.

At this stage the 20,000 'subversives' on MI5's computers will be rounded up and interned. Just before a nuclear attack on Britain all elected bodies will be disbanded as control is devolved to a group of Regional Commissioners stationed in their bunkers. The transition from a democracy at peace to a fledgling totalitarian state at war will be complete.

The Home Office is hoping that these exercises will lay the ghost of Operation Hard Rock, the national exercise which had to be cancelled in 1982 due to the non-co-operation of Nuclear-Free Zone Councils. For the peace movement they represent one more opportunity to expose civil defence's hidden agenda of coercion and control.

● Charles Searle

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