

# Pecking order laid down for telephone use after the bomb

By John Carvel, Local Government Correspondent

The Government has asked local authorities for help in updating a scheme to restrict use of the telephone system in time of war.

It has sent out a circular revising categories of priority telephone users which might come into force after a nuclear attack. The circular, classified "Restricted", says that the need for an annual review of the names of individuals qualifying telephone priority "cannot be too strongly emphasised".

Its disclosure follows a report in yesterday's Guardian that civil defence officials in Whitehall have made plans to distribute 56 million sets of food ration documents within a week in the event of a crisis or war.

The circular has been distributed by the common services unit of the Environment and Transport Departments. It gives priority, among others, to local mayors, but not to council leaders.

The circular affords telephone privileges to judges, MPs, doctors, dentists, lock-keepers, foreign embassies, museums, prisons, and ice manufacturers. But it makes no mention of churchmen, who might be expected to play an important part in maintaining the morale of a community in crisis.

The circular makes no mention, either, of the possibility that the telephone system would be put out of action by the electro-magnetic pulse of a nuclear explosion.

"The Government Telephone Preference Scheme provides for those engaged in essential work to have continued use of pre-designated telephones in emergencies when outgoing telephone service is being withdrawn from others. It

would come into operation only if an intolerable burden were placed on the public telephone network," explains the circular, sent out earlier this month.

"The scheme is operated by British Telecom on behalf of central government and provides for telephone lines connected to the public telephone network to be classified in the following categories: "Category I — lines vital to the prosecution of war and to national survival after an attack on the UK.

"Category II — additional lines necessary to maintain life of the community during a civil emergency.

"Category III — lines for which there is no entitlement to any preference.

"The percentage of lines at individual BT telephone exchanges which may be designated for preference categories is up to 2 per cent for Category I and up to 10 per cent for Categories I and II combined."

The circular says that if the traffic loading of an exchange needed to be reduced the first stage would be to deprive some or possibly all Category III subscribers of the ability to make outgoing calls. If circumstances got worse outgoing calls would be limited to Category I. "Under preference working, telephone numbers barred from outgoing service would in general still be able to receive incoming calls."

Where the number of bids for preference in any area exceeded the available capacity and the matter could not be resolved by local negotiation, "the telephone general manager will refer the matter to BT headquarters, who will pursue it with the Telecommunications Secretariat at Cabinet Office."

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## Boiled rat and beans for nuclear warning meal

BY JIM SAUNDERS

A MEAL of boiled rat and baked beans was eaten by a Telford Labour councillor yesterday in a graphic demonstration of what people could face following a nuclear war.

Cllr. Simon Taylor is chairman of Wrekin District Council's civil defence working group, which is now pressing the government to give detailed explanations of its plans which local authorities are being pressurised to implement. "I just want to bring it home to people that the risk of nuclear war is immediate," said Cllr Taylor. The government's £70 million a year spending on civil defence, he said, "is not spent to ensure the safety of the ordinary man in the street."

His council has declared its area a nuclear-free zone, and has gone on record against the principle of civil defence in a nuclear war. Cllr. Taylor cooked his "laboratory-killed animal" in a government-designed shelter he built in a "bomb damaged house" as part of this week's nationwide peace action. "The idea was to show what ordinary people could be living like after a nuclear blast," he said. Contrary to government claims, he said, independent research shows it could be "anything up to three or four weeks before the danger level drops." By that time "people could be starving and could well resort to eating rats to survive."

## Buzby's bricks in anti-nuclear pile

CIVIL DEFENCE

G.H. 6/2/83

CONCRETE blocks are being delivered to telephone exchanges and radio relay stations in Scotland to protect vital equipment from blast damage in the event of a nuclear attack.

who lives in Queen Street, made checks with the local planning authority but no-one could tell him about any building proposed for the area.

During the past six months the V-shaped foot long bricks that would be erected Lego-fashion to build walls if Britain was on a war-footing have been stockpiled beside British Telecom property.

The residents eventually had their fears allayed when the postmaster told them that the bricks would be used to protect telephone equipment in the event of a nuclear attack.

In a padlocked yard alongside the telephone exchange in Terrace Road, Carnoustie, there are about 1000 of the grey or sand coloured blocks stacked on eight pallets and covered by heavy plastic sheeting.

Before heading for their own bolt-holes Telecom staff would go to the unmanned exchange and set up the bricks around the automatic gear.

When the bricks began to arrive anxious householders in Terrace Road and Queen Street began to make enquiries, fearing a building eyesore at the bottom of their gardens.

In theory Buzby would be alive and well when all around was devastated.

A British Telecom official at its London headquarters would not comment because it involved national defence and was the province of the Home Office.

A Scottish Office spokesman said: "This is not part of the Government's general defence preparations. It is entirely a British Telecom affair."

Mr Peter Gordon, a teacher