

Most nuclear survivors 5 6/7/84 'would starve to death'

In the event of a nuclear attack on Britain most of the perhaps 15 million survivors would starve to death because of the collapse of agriculture, according to a study published today.

While there might not be an immediate famine, with food to feed one quarter of those who survive the initial effects of an attack, in the longer term all but four million would die of starvation and related diseases in new Dark Ages.

The study, the latest in a series on the effects of nuclear war by Bradford University's School of Peace Studies, is based on a 260-megaton attack on Britain against a variety of military and civilian targets.

The author, Mr George Crossley, concludes that the blast from a one-megaton bomb could flatten nearly all trees over about 55 square miles; heat from the bomb could set fire to grain crops over 260 square miles; and kill livestock over 165 square miles.

"The consequences of just the blast and heat alone could be serious: livestock losses could be over 25 per cent for the dairy industry. If the attack occurs in summer then over 75 per cent of the grain crops might be burnt in the fields as a result of direct exposure to heat from explosions and from wildfires."

At other times of the year drought might be the dominant effect on agriculture. At worst the loss in grain yield as a result might amount to 5.5 million tons, or 34 per cent of annual production. On average

By CHRIS MULLINGER

the grain yield might be reduced by 16 per cent. Livestock losses might amount to 25 per cent.

The Government, through the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, has elaborate plans for the direct command of all farms in the event of nuclear attack but Mr Crossley concludes they are unlikely to work as a result of the probable destruction of divisional HQs and the breakdown of communications.

Distribution of food could be patchy, owing to lack of fuel, with the result that there might be areas of relative plenty among very impoverished regions. As a consequence, there could be large movements of survivors threatening a breakdown of agricultural production in the host areas resulting in further immediate and long-term shortages.

As a result of his research, Mr Crossley believes that within two to three years of a nuclear attack, the initial number of survivors would be reduced by 75 per cent by starvation unless there was outside intervention — leaving only 7 per cent of the population alive.

"Those who survive the first five years can look forward to a very different society to that existing today," he concludes. "Society will be based on subsistence agriculture; authority will be regionalised, based either on surviving remnants of decentralised government or other bodies that have gained power.

"What remains of society may at best be reminiscent of the Dark Ages, introspective, at the mercy of climate and authoritarian."

● Doctors yesterday called for a big reduction in world arms spending — both nuclear and conventional — so the money saved might be used to improve health and welfare. The resolution at the British Medical Association's annual meeting in Manchester was approved by the necessary two-thirds majority.

The wide margin was required because the motion was seen as overturning previous BMA policy against taking a political stance on nuclear war issues.

The 600 doctors at the meeting also voted to urge the Government to make known its plans for civil defence and the provision of health services in time of war.