

FREEZING TO DEATH IN THE DARK

THE END OF CIVIL DEFENCE

If a nuclear war took place complete darkness would cover the whole of the Northern Hemisphere for at least 12 months, and the population would freeze to death in temperatures of 35-40 degrees (centigrade) below zero. These conditions could spread rapidly into the Southern Hemisphere.

This would happen if only one-third of the nuclear weapons held by America and Russia (about 5000 megatons) were exploded. About 100 megatons exploded over British cities (half the amount visualised in Home Office civil defence briefings) would produce two months of sub-freezing temperatures dropping to 23 degrees centigrade.

These are some of the new and startling conclusions reached by an international group of leading scientists at a conference described by Prof. Mike Pentz in the January issue of *Sanity* and in articles published by the *Guardian* and *New Statesman*.

The conference had an authoritative, semi-official status. It was sponsored by 30 leading scientific, environment and public policy institutions in America, funded by 20 private foundations, including the Rockefeller Family Fund, and supported by a scientific advisory board of 60 scientists from 10 countries, with four Nobel prize winners among them. Preliminary work had been done by more than 100 nuclear and atmospheric physicists and biologists. The conference ended with a television link-up between Washington and 100 experts from the Soviet Academy of Sciences in Moscow. In both capitals there was unanimous agreement on the findings.

They agreed that smoke and dust from the explosions, particularly over cities, and from burning cities, forests and grasslands, would cut off the rays of the sun. In a week or two temperatures would be down to 35-40 degrees below freezing and almost immediately the Northern Hemisphere would be in darkness. Even on what would normally be a bright summer day there would be heavy twilight at midday. Vegetation not destroyed by the fires would be



killed by frost, and farm animals would freeze to death. Drinking water would be frozen.

With the smoke there would be other effects. Nuclear explosions produce nitrogen oxides which destroy the ozone layer in the upper atmosphere. This layer protects the world from an overdose of the sun's ultra-violet rays. Smoke would at first absorb the ultra-violet rays, but as it cleared after about a year, greatly increased amounts of the rays would reach earth, with dire effects on all living organisms.

The effect of masses of smoke in the atmosphere would be to extend radioactive fallout over weeks and months. This would mean that people struggling for life as temperatures dropped would be subjected to radiation doses equivalent to 2000 medical X-rays, weakening them beyond the point where they could expect to survive.

The Southern Hemisphere would be cut off from the food and materials it normally gets from the North, and it would be affected by drifting clouds of fallout. Even a slight drop in temperature would kill off tropical forests and other vegetation. Starvation and disease would spread rapidly, and the final result might well be the extinction of all life on earth.

This new information obviously has profound implications for the Government's 'civil defence' programme and the implementation of the new legislation forcing councils to build 'emergency centres' and train staff.

The basis of the Government's argument for civil defence, and its attempt to achieve a 'humane' image, is that though millions will die, more will survive if they are protected; and that the country, though devastated in many areas, can be restored to normal life by firm government under regional commissioners in their bunkers. But there is now no longer even a slender foundation for this propaganda. How can civil defence operate in a country frozen to death in continual darkness? Those councils, like Hove, which are now honing up their civil defence plans are living in a dream world.

But it also means that CND's previous campaign has become out-of-date. In our opposition to civil defence we have been willing to concede that some few people might live after a nuclear war, though civilisation would perish and the living would envy the dead. But we now know that nobody would survive a temperature of 35-40 degrees below zero, followed by a roasting in ultra-violet rays and massive doses of radioactive fallout.

Our pamphlets with their rings around cities indicating the extent of blast fire and radiation are now irrelevant. An appropriate picture for a leaflet is now that of a frozen corpse in a landscape of ice and darkness, with no living creature existing.

Philip Bolsover