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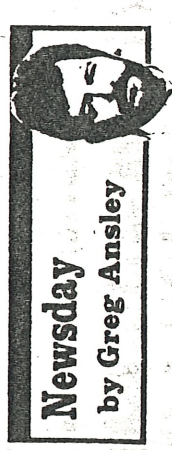
NZ faces refugee flood from nuclear war

Tucked away in the Planning Council's...lling forecast of New Zealand in the aftermath of nuclear war is a section dealing with a problem that would assume vast proportions should the worst come to pass. Right when this country was at its most vulnerable, fighting to contain panic, to feed its people and to keep them well, the population would boom by more than 100,000, equivalent to adding a city the size of Dunedin to our woes.

That is a conservative estimate, yet would place great strains on New Zealand even in times of normality. The reason for the influx is this: Because this country would be relatively unhurt, we would be seen as a haven for refugees, both in the build-up to war and in its aftermath. Tens of thousands of tourists, businessmen and other foreigners would be trapped here when the bombs fell. And dozens of ships and aircraft, should they survive, would likely divert here.

The scenario put forward by the Planning Council stems from an assumed crisis that has put nuclear nerves on edge. When the warheads were unleashed, it was most likely by accident. A conference of scientists from the East and West last year concluded a nuclear war would probably be triggered by "irrational acts, mistakes and malfunctions." The Northern Hemisphere suffered heavily, because the vast majority of American, French, British, Chinese and Soviet warheads were aimed at each other. It is almost impossible to realise the enormity of the outcome: A predicted 250m to 1000m people killed by the bombs; more than a third of the developed world's combustible materials consumed by fireballs; the great cities of the world devastated; vast areas of grassland and forest razed by fires burning out of control.

In the wake of the bombs came the nuclear winter, wrecking agriculture and causing severe disruptions to the global weather machine. In Africa and Asia, the monsoons vital to food production would cease for two years or more. Pollution would destroy



Newsday by Greg Ansley

forests, foul water supplies and snuff out insect, animal, fish and bird life. Less than 5 per cent of the world's 5000m population, it is estimated, could survive by living off the land. Mass starvation would follow, accompanied by ravaging plagues.

Across the Tasman, the scenario has Australia bombed at the U.S. installations of Pine Gap, Nurrangar and North West Cape. Apart from the terror this would inspire, the town of Alice Springs would be wiped out, and Adelaide, with other parts of southern Australia, would be threatened by Radioactive fallout, according to Australian studies.

The Planning Council report also considers the possibility that the naval installation at Cockburn Sound, Western Australia may be wiped out, which would atomise the city of Perth, that the air force base at Darwin, where America stations some B52 bombers, may go; and that the capital, Canberra, may be bombed, just three hours' drive from Sydney.

Power surge

New Zealand would suffer little from radiation and, the report says, should be able to produce sufficient food to feed itself. But the nation would have been sorely rocked by the probable loss of almost every modern system of operating our society. That would happen within a millionth of a second, and deepen as the structures crumbled.

This is the effect of electromagnetic pulse, a massive power surge caused by the high-altitude detonation of warheads designed to knock out the opposing superpowers' defence and communications systems.

In 1962, the Americans exploded a 1.4 megaton warhead 400km above Johnston Island in the Pacific. In Honolulu, 1300km distant, 300 streetlights went out, circuit breakers blew, and burglar alarms rang. That would be multiplied to an incalculable degree by nuclear war. In New Zealand we would lose television and radio communication, electrical supply, computer networks, health care facilities, and transport systems.

New Zealand would be a traumatised nation. We would be alone, with no prospect of help from outside. The likely national psychoses that would follow a holocaust are dealt with in detail on p8, but, in brief, include a probable exodus from the cities into rural areas, food stockpiling, the collapse of the economy and financial systems, severe conflict between citizens and authorities, and the loss of medicines and the consequent spread of disease.

Into this would come thousands of people fleeing the terror abroad. Numbers are impossible to estimate, but the report suggests a flood of expatriate New Zealanders (there are 400,000, 207,000 of them in Australia), and possibly Tokelau, Cook and Niue Islanders. Australians may also come here under the no-visa policy. If a significant number did arrive, the report says, they would strain housing, employment and social services.

If the war came with little warning, there could be up to 45,000 foreigners trapped here. Even if they were the only refugees, they would create significant demands. The report noted: "Forty-five thousand people is four times the annual number of permanent immigrants presently accepted into New Zealand."

New Zealand could also expect at least 15,000 more refugees among the crews of ships diverting to New Zealand. Aircraft about to reach our airports could add thousands more: On any one day, for example, 12 international flights arrive with up to 3400 passengers.

After the war refugees could include civilians (some armed) and military survivors who may see us as their best chance. The report does not address the problems of rival forces seeking refuge here, but warns that intentions would vary from looking for a haven, to bargaining for resources, to direct military conflict. Just how many civilians would make it is a different matter, given New Zealand's isolation.

Apart from nuclear-armed vessels or surviving military forces bringing war with them, the report believes the most serious threat would be refugees carrying infectious diseases, among them plague, typhoid fever, cholera, typhus and leprosy, which would have become widespread in the Northern hemisphere. New Zealand would be vulnerable. Within a year, existing vaccines and other drugs would be almost exhausted, without any alternative means of coping with major epidemics.

There would be other problems: "Large numbers of refugees would impose severe demands on basic services and would further overload a social system struggling to cope with local requirements. In peacetime, refugees can be housed, fed and supported by government and other agencies until they become financially self-sufficient. After nuclear war those services would be very heavily overloaded."

Deciding how to cope with this is a new dilemma. Said the report: "The first view is the humanitarian response that no matter what the cost or risks, New Zealand should allow unlimited entry to refugees. But would that be fair to other New Zealanders if the numbers were large, if they spread diseases and imposed significant demands on local resources?"

"And even if only a few refugees were allowed entry, who would choose, and on what basis? Either decision would be difficult to make."