THE STAR

MONDAY, AUGUST 24, 1987

No consolation fallout not main problem

A STUDY by the Planning Council has concluded social rather than environmental problems would be New Zealand's main concern if there was a nuclear war in the Northern Hemisphere. Contrary to popular belief, the effect of nuclear fallout, even if Australia were bombed, would be negligible here.

The Opposition spokesman on disarmament, Mr Doug Graham, apparently believes such conclusions justify the National Party's nuclear stand. He says emotional propaganda, appearing almost daily, had led people to believe New Zealand would be subject to the effects of a nuclear blast. The report showed New Zealanders had a poor understanding of the effect of a nuclear war.

Unfortunately there are no such things as good or bad nuclear wars. Even if our worst fears are not realised the effects of a nuclear war are still too horrible to contemplate. It would be a small consolation that we suffered only a nuclear "autumn" and not the nuclear "winter" which would devastate the Northern Hemisphere.

It is of little significance 50 per cent of those questioned thought radioactive fallout would be the most serious consequence of a nuclear war for New Zealand. What is more important is for them to realise that after a nuclear war we would have no links with the Northern Hemisphere, where hundreds of millions of people would have died.

This would mean the loss of virtually all medicines and medical supplies; about 40 per cent of the population would lose their jobs when exporting stopped. The emotional upset would be horrendous as a majority of New Zealanders would have kith or kin in the Northern Hemisphere who would either be dead or dying.

The Planning Council does not attempt to down-play any of this. In fact it makes the point that life without the threat of nuclear war must always be the most important goal.

Mr Graham might construe some aspects of the pursuit of this goal as nothing more than emotional propaganda, but he is out of step with the majority. The fate of the survivors of a nuclear war could be more cruel than that of those who perish.