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Evening Standard

Editorial

Palmerston North's first daily newspaper. Established November, 1880. Circulating throughout the Manawatu, Southern Hawke's Bay, Northern Wairarapa, Rangitikei and Horowhenua districts.

Monday, August 24, 1987

Planning for the day after

WILL there be life after a nuclear holocaust? The subject is one that has been explored countless times in novels, plays, movies and television dramas. In most of those scenarios small bands of survivors eke out an almost feudal existence, warring among themselves for food and other essentials.

The long list of published works has been joined by another — from the New Zealand Planning Council — which predicts that although New Zealand would probably survive a nuclear war, our continued existence would be fairly grim. That is assuming, of course, that New Zealand is not a target for nuclear missiles.

Post-nuclear life would not be easy. According to the Planning Council report, which was funded with Rainbow Warrior bombing reparation money, New Zealand has more to fear from lack of bureaucratic preparedness than from radioactive fallout. We would face post-nuclear ruin from massive unemployment, sickness and diseases, coupled with a shortage of medical supplies, an end to trade and a shortage of essential imports. Coupled with this would be increased pollution and depletion of natural resources as people strive for self-sufficiency without adequate planning.

The report makes a number of recommendations which, if implemented now, could make New Zealanders' lot an easier one in a post-nuclear world. Some of the recommendations could, in the long term, be of benefit to the country even if a nuclear war never takes place. This nation's dependence on imported pharmaceuticals stands out as one of our biggest drawbacks, and the report

urges consideration of the stockpiling of medicines and even making New Zealand self-reliant in essential medicines. That is something the Government should look at as a matter of course rather than as preparation for the aftermath of a nuclear war.

The report makes a number of other recommendations which one would normally expect in such a document. Things like the stockpiling of seeds, animal vaccines, and essential trace elements, planning alternative farming practices, new crops and other methods of food processing.

But the most important point the report highlights is the fact that New Zealand has no contingency plan for post-nuclear survival. In essence that means we would probably be worse off than necessary because the authorities would not be able to cope with the decisions necessary in the immediate crisis period. And at that stage it would be too late to take the necessary steps for long-term survival.

The planning must be done now. The stockpiles should be set up and the alternative fuel and energy sources, the alternative farming methods and the food processing plant developed. And people throughout the country should be trained in their use. After all, some of the techniques developed could be used as part of our aid to developing countries.

At the same time, on the international scene, the Government must continue working for world peace. Although our anti-nuclear policy is not for export, we can continue to lead by example and tell the world that nuclear weapons are not the way to lasting peace.