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## No sanctuary in a nuclear age

ANY SOLEMN REPORT on the unknown is likely to come up with some arresting conclusions. Early explorers from Europe once reported that they thought they could hear the bells of paradise ringing some 40 leagues beyond the island of Sri Lanka. In this less spiritual age the New Zealand Planning Council's study on New Zealand After Nuclear War considers that in our post-war circumstances there is likely to be an increase in sexually transmitted disease.

While this is not as poetic as hearing the bells of paradise, it is, in its own way, an optimistic sign that this French-funded study, paid for by reparations following the Rainbow Warrior bombing, should report that New Zealanders will still have the time and enthusiasm needed for recreational activity.

In the midst of darkness there are some other pinpoints of light. The study predicts that fuel lines are likely to be disrupted so Motunui could come into its own. Think Big will be vindicated and the name of Bill Birch will be called blessed.

While this may seem excessively optimistic our data base is too narrow to plausibly guess what will be relevant to post-nuclear survivors in the Pacific area. It does, however, seem curious that we should feel our interests are served by engaging in navel-gazing on the side-lines while the rest of the world's democracies grapple with the challenge of trying to avert war by finding ways in which the super-powers can come to terms with each other and the fears of their allies.

Before a disaster occurs we can be detached but when or if a nuclear accident or attack takes place, it is our world too that is threatened and our current nuclear-free status has no relevance to our future.

If we emerged relatively unscathed then the mobile victims from areas more gravely affected would most assuredly retreat here or to similarly geographically favoured areas such as South Africa, Chile and the Argentine.

With bases in Australia a predicted Soviet target the present transtasman migration trend might be reversed. Having never shown much enthusiasm for a visit, Mr Bob Hawke might decide to stay. Whatever happens will do so regardless of our current anti-nuclear policies or the orderly bureaucratic procedures on which our system is now based.

Thus the Planning Council's view that New Zealand would have "to take tough decisions on whether to accept refugees," overlooks the probability that such applicants for entry might not be willing to wait around while a committee set up by the Minister considered their case.

Should the Navy be strengthened to keep out the boat people of the future; or the Army be equipped to defend airports against jetloads of European refugees?

In strategic terms this country is unlikely to be a target in a nuclear war. This does not mean that at a time of breakdown in the normal human rules we would not be attacked, rather that there is no rational reason for doing so. But whether contingency planning would have much final relevance or not, the Government could be seen to have a duty to set a planning unit up to do some thinking for the unthinkable.

We should, however, remain sceptical that even a full mobilisation of all our resources could do much to mitigate the effect here of explosive attacks elsewhere. There is no real sanctuary in the nuclear age.