

Living with the bomb

WHEN the Rainbow Warrior was bombed in Auckland harbour on July 10, 1985, it was en route to Mururoa to publicise the horrors of nuclear war. The French Government's act of terrorism was designed to hide its Pacific nuclear testing programme from the glare of publicity. It is a fitting irony that to this day the French action continues to highlight the nuclear menace in a way that the modest mission of the Rainbow Warrior could never have achieved.

The latest demonstration of the aftershock from the Rainbow Warrior bombing is the Planning Council's report, *New Zealand After a Nuclear War*. The report was prepared using some of the reparation money from the French Government.

The council's report is an important document which examines the reality of the nuclear threat to New Zealand. It is emphatic in its conclusion that the main dangers from a nuclear war do not lie in the horrifying projections of a nuclear winter. Radioactive fallout would most likely not affect New Zealand directly, and it is post-war survival that we should dwell on.

A curious preoccupation in the wake of the report is the effect of a nuclear war on the finance sector, microwave ovens, computers and cars. It is an indication that we have not come to terms with the notion of basic survival. Certainly the report dwells on these matters, but the central issues are water, sanitation, food production and medical supplies. The price of Brierley shares in a post-war, subsistence economy is hardly of major concern.

The council's report identifies a lack of preparedness in facing these basic survival issues. But worse than that, it shows that no plans have been made and that the organisation to anticipate nuclear war does not exist.

This alarming truth is not new; the inability of our civil defence structure to cope with natural disasters has surfaced before. This reflects not so much on the efforts of those working in the organisation as on the inadequate commitment of the resources required to anticipate and plan for all eventualities. That Dr Michael Bassett's move from the health portfolio to internal and local affairs and civil defence was seen as a demotion is evidence of that thinking.

The Government could usefully direct Dr Bassett to rectify this warped sense of priorities. As a start, the Planning Council should have its work extended to include a thorough study of existing structures and resources with a view to creating a civil defence organisation that will provide the security so obviously missing now. It is to the Government's credit that it has finally highlighted deficiencies in our civil defence, but it will be to no avail if the resources to bring about changes are not quickly committed.

Labour has achieved a radical shift in New Zealand's thinking about nuclear issues and our ability to play a part in prevention of nuclear disaster. The Planning Council's report rightly accords the highest priority to prevention. But it is time to concentrate on the less romantic aspect of the nuclear threat. That is the challenge of the council's report and it is one that must be taken up immediately.