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Post-nuclear war survival plan urged

New Zealand is probably one of the few places which has a chance of surviving after a northern hemisphere nuclear war, but planning and discussion on how to do it must start beforehand, says psychologist Mr John Henderson.

In a paper he presented to the Psychological Society Conference at the weekend, Mr Henderson said an alternative system of government to maintain law and order would have to be ready to swing into action following a nuclear war in the northern hemisphere, to help prevent wide breakdown of society.

In the chaos and lack of communication that would follow a nuclear war, gangs and robber barons would take power in the absence of a power group and clash over resources.

Armed forces

Mr Henderson said a post-nuclear system of government could be formed from the police, the armed forces, or civil defence. However it was most likely to come from the armed forces, which already assisted with disasters like earthquakes and floods.

People should be repeatedly and clearly told of what plans were made and what their rights and duties under them would be. It should be made clear that this did not mean war was inevitable or it was useless to strive against it, Mr Henderson said.

It may also be advisable to start public debate on issues like which people de-

pendent on imported medicines, should be allowed to continue using them, as these would run out quickly.

"The immediacy that such discussion would bring to the issue of war might well energise a strong antiwar movement at the grass-roots level." Discussion would be very heated, and would need up-to-date information, which would in turn give the Government good reason for repeating and updating information, he said.

Brutal life

Following a northern hemisphere nuclear war, life in New Zealand would be nasty, brutal and short. Stress and breakdown of sanitation would reduce resistance to disease, and the life expectancy possibly dropping to 35-40. Large numbers of children would need to be born if humanity was to survive.

It would take two years at the very least for society to adjust to post-nuclear war conditions.

Plans for controlling power would have to include when to revert to a democratic central government, and this stage would be another danger point for social breakdown.

Less planning

The less planning now for a post-nuclear society, the more New Zealand society would revert to a very primitive state, Mr Henderson said.

Mr Henderson's paper was part of the Planning Council's study *New Zealand After Nuclear War*.