

New Zealand Ponders a 'Nuclear Survival Kit'

By SETH MYDANS

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WELLINGTON, New Zealand, Feb. 10 — Isolated in the distant South Pacific and stubbornly free of nuclear weapons and nuclear power, New Zealand has begun examining ways to survive a nuclear war.

Using French reparations funds from the bombing of the anti-nuclear Greenpeace vessel Rainbow Warrior in 1985, the Government commissioned a six-month study last year titled "After Nuclear War."

The study said that with much of the rest of the world destroyed, New Zealand's most serious problems would come from its loss of trading partners and of imported products.

It predicted that the radioactive fallout and climatic changes that would devastate the Northern Hemisphere would be minimal for New Zealand.

Instead, said Roger Blakely, the Secretary of the Environment, his nation would face problems of unemployment, a disruption of health services, damage to transportation and communication services and questions of "social disorder and confusion."

Top Priority Is Prevention

The report made clear that the first priority should be prevention of war, and noted that "although New Zealand would be among the countries least affected by nuclear war, the effects here would still be catastrophic."

It urged the preparation of contingency plans along with immediate actions to reduce vulnerability to the problems it described.

Publication of the report last fall received wide attention in the press, including reports, like one that began, "More unwanted pregnancies and more toothaches would be just two health consequences from a big cutoff of imported medical supplies."

The Government has now embarked on its second step in preparing for a postwar world.

Next month, Mr. Blakely's department is due to issue a follow-up report based on a series of public hearings and written proposals for contingency plans.

For example, said Peter Rankin, head of the Planning Council, which commissioned the first study, the Ministry of Agriculture is considering preparing special seed banks.

After the report was published, he said, someone in the Postal Department, which was installing a new electronic telephone system, said: "Hey, look, we wouldn't be able to use these newfangled things. Let's keep some of the old ones along with their instruction manuals."

Pharmaceutical Shortage

Mr. Blakely said the possibility was being examined of stockpiling pharmaceuticals or moving toward the use of traditional medicines, given the dependence on imported drugs.

He said thought must be given to "what would be our relations with other Southern Hemisphere countries, and with any Northern Hemisphere countries that might be able to be in a position to have dealings with us."

But before serious preparations are considered, he said, fundamental thinking is needed over just what degree of contingency planning should be done.

"We must think which sectors would require contingency plans, the Government, civil defense or private sector groups," he said.

A sense of nuclear immunity was a factor in New Zealand's strong anti-nuclear position that led to its banning in 1985 of visits by American naval vessels that carry atomic weapons or are nuclear powered.

Focus on Societal Responses

That ban led to the suspension of the Anzus treaty under which the United States provided military support to New Zealand and Australia, a move that appears to have reinforced this nation's sense of mission.

"I think New Zealand has taken the lead in terms of initiating this sort of study," Mr. Blakely said.

"There have been other studies of the impacts of a nuclear winter, but I think we are the first to focus on what the societal responses might be and what steps might be taken for possible preparedness."

New Zealand has long been seen as a potential refuge in the event of a nuclear war, and there has been a small but steady flow of immigrants from the Northern Hemisphere since the early 1960's.

Some of these immigrants have integrated into mainstream society, but others have joined small survivalist communities scattered across this nation of three million people.

Some of the survivalists say that in selecting New Zealand they have tried to take into account all the various catastrophes the future may hold, including earthquakes, tidal waves, ozone depletion and a global warming.

Handbooks on the Market

Handbooks are available in Wellington bookshops, like "A Nuclear Survival Manual for New Zealanders" by Brian Hildreth, whose tips range from finding drinking water to the digging of latrines to a discussion of whether to hide from or to fight fellow survivors.

He prescribes a basic "nuclear survival kit" that includes a good raincoat, air rifle, vitamin C capsules, a ball of string, a cake of soap and maps.

Cigarettes are included in the list, with the notation, "If you are a smoker, sudden deprivation under stressful conditions may be difficult to cope with."

Mr. Hildreth advises his readers to keep nuclear catastrophe constantly in mind.

"When, to the best of your ability, you have formulated your plans for survival and self-reliance, one final factor remains," he writes, "the maintenance of a perpetual state of readiness."