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CIVIL DEFENCE COMMITTEE

INFORMING THE PUBLIC

Draft Report by the Senior Civil Defence Advisor

(Note: This is a revision of AC/98-D/64)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The task of informing the public must be a continuous one, starting in peacetime, being carried on through any period of tension and during war itself. They should be told about the limitations and capabilities of the weapons that might be used, so as to prevent surprise and consequent loss of morale. They should be made to realise that they must take an active part in their own defence. And at all times they should be kept au fait with what is happening and what action they are required to take, for the security of themselves, their families or their employees.

2. To initiate and carry out a programme with this end in view is a public relations task. To be successful, the campaign should be directed and thought out by professionals, who are trained to understand and handle public reactions. Naturally Governments must provide the material and have a say in the timing and the degree of urgency which is imparted to the campaign. But unless the whole matter is treated as a highly skilled operation requiring expert handling, the results are not likely to be very successful.

3. With these remarks in mind, the major problems are set out in this memorandum and suggestions made as to some of the ways in which they might be handled.

II. SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS

(i) In peacetime

4. During peacetime, the most important consideration must be the mental, and to a more limited extent, the physical preparation of the population. A very great deal will depend on the success or failure of these efforts.

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5. This problem is difficult unless there is a state of special international tension. There is a cold war tension going on all the time; but as the old proverb states "Familiarity breeds Contempt" or, to adapt it to modern conditions, it might be truer to say "Familiarity breeds disinterest". In this lies danger. There is also a feeling that another war would be so ghastly as to be unthinkable, i.e. it can't happen.

6. Furthermore with wireless, television and the newspaper headlines, there is very little encouragement to individual thinking and, as a natural corollary, initiative. The public, therefore, are apt to be interested in what they are fed on; and the meals provided are mainly those which the caterers think will attract the largest consumers (audiences or readers).

7. It is quite obvious that, under these conditions, the sort of mental preparation with which this memorandum is concerned will have a very low priority indeed in the general scheme of public entertainment and information.

8. Governments are naturally reluctant to adopt "scare tactics" unless the threat is very real; and, even so, the public is apt to have its own ideas as to what is a real crisis and what is not. Such tactics are in any case undesirable, since their effect is usually temporary unless the "scare" is followed by war.

9. The vast sums of money spent on advertising undoubtedly show a return, otherwise the effort would cease. Their object is probably two-fold: to draw people's attention to a certain article in the most arresting and attractive way possible, and by constant repetition to affect the sub-conscious mind even to the extent of influencing people to ask for a certain brand or make of article without perhaps realising why they do so.

10. These points have been made because there are lessons to be learned from them - the most important perhaps being that a fairly constant reminder may be the most effective form of mental preparation.

11. The objects which it is desired to achieve in attempting to prepare the population may be briefly stated as follows:-

- (a) To give them a balanced view of the capabilities and limitations of thermo-nuclear warfare. This is essential to avoid surprise and to counteract the idea that "there is nothing to be done."
- (b) To get the idea accepted that the necessity for peacetime preparations to defend the "Home Front" does not imply an immediate threat of war, and should be regarded in the same light as the need to maintain armed forces. A form of insurance, in fact.

- (c) To encourage the idea that these "Home Front" defence preparations form an important part of the deterrent. In other words, that they will make an essential contribution to helping to keep the peace.
- (d) To bring home the idea that unless certain essential preparations are made in peacetime, there is a grave risk that, if war occurs, there will be no time to complete them. In other words, the war will be fought with what is available at the time and not with what it is hoped to get subsequently.
- (e) To make known, so far as security considerations permit, the plans of the central and local governments for their protection.
- (f) To explain why they must themselves take an active part in these preparations, and just what is expected of them.
- (g) To indicate what simple training and preparations will enable them to help to protect themselves and their homes and in doing so, their country.

12. The objects listed above are not necessarily exhaustive, but indicate, it is hoped, some of the most important.

13. As regards the media to be employed, some suggestions are included in an Appendix. These are all familiar in the main, but are based on the experience of members of the Alliance and include indications as to their application to particular subjects.

14. It is a truism that the methods used to attempt the education of the public will vary from country to country, as will the timing. There are political considerations to be taken into account. It is, however, important to seize particular opportunities as they may occur. Since these fortuitous occasions may be rare, opportunities must be made at suitable intervals.

15. It is also important to decide how much of the information propaganda, training etc. is to be attempted in normal times, and how much left to a period of tension. Ideally, as much as possible should be accomplished beforehand, as there is no guarantee that there will be sufficient time later, even if a period of tension is experienced.

(ii) In time of tension

16. Once a period of tension has occurred, or circumstances have arisen indicating a definite threat of war, then precise instructions should be issued to the population.

17. These instructions should urge the public to complete their preparations as quickly as possible (a time limit might be important) and should add any additional requirements that have had to be left to this period.

18. Among the things to be done might be mentioned:-

Blackout. Depending on the policy of the government, an immediate blackout might be ordered, or the public told to be ready to black out their premises at short notice.

Food Storage. Instructions to complete the household etc. food reserves. The policy should have already been laid down and made known, i.e. essential items to cover a period of, for example, seven days.

Water. Similar instructions as for food supplies, but to include a sufficient amount for general domestic requirements.

Sanitation. Instructions to prepare emergency arrangements to ensure sanitation.

Shelter. Instructions to prepare a shelter room or rooms on lines laid down. The government must decide on the degree of protection to be attempted. The minimum should be against fallout.

Instructions. Information must be given as to when and how instructions will be issued and how received, including essential wave lengths to note, etc.

First Aid and Fire. Instructions or reminders about supplies of equipment to be provided.

19. It is very obvious that unless the population has made reasonable provision beforehand, there will be a run on supplies, which may be quickly exhausted and may leave many households inadequately provided. Whether governments should lay in supplies beforehand to meet anticipated shortages of this kind should be carefully considered. It would seem advisable, unless there can be any assurance that the public have done what was asked of them, which must be very doubtful.

20. It is clear that households should have some simple printed instructions covering these matters. If they have not been issued, now is the time to do it. But it will be much safer, on all grounds, to have issued them before a period of tension arises.

21. The Government and other authorities will use whatever methods are quickest and most convenient to disseminate these instructions, which will probably include wardens and street leaders if they have been appointed.

(iii) In time of war

22. It is not proposed to go into any detail in regard to this phase, as there are all sorts of unknown and probably unpredictable factors which must be taken into account at the time, and which will influence the action taken.

23. If there has been no period of tension, or for various reasons it has been impossible to take action on the lines suggested in paras. 19 to 24, it will obviously be important to do whatever may be possible in these respects.

24. Instructions will have to be issued to the public from time to time, and it will be important to keep them informed of the situation and to take such other steps as may be possible to help to sustain their morale. It will be essential to counter enemy propaganda, which must be expected to be formidable, and also damaging rumours. The results of allied retaliatory action should also be given.

25. Ability to maintain broadcasting, and possible television, without assisting the navigation of enemy aircraft is of especial importance, together of course with means to receive these services at the other end. Battery-powered receivers may be essential.

26. Some thought and preparation on general lines should be given to these wartime problems, and methods by which instructions, propaganda, information etc. can be disseminated to and received by the public. It is especially important to arrange for a number of alternative methods, since communications of all kinds may be subjected to severe dislocation.

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METHODS OF INFORMING THE PUBLIC
IN PEACETIME

A. METHODS GIVING A WIDE APPEAL

1. The Press should be used extensively - the national papers for important announcements and the local press for topical matters associated with the community amongst which the local papers circulate. It often happens that local papers are read more carefully than national papers, and should therefore carry regular features if possible. Weekly papers, magazines, journals etc. should all be used.

Success in this matter depends on the willingness of the press to cooperate, and the importance of getting their good-will is high. The press may well have to be educated! The really important thing is to get continuity and regular service, with special featuring on appropriate occasions.

2. Broadcasting should equally be used as much as possible. News items are important, as well as special features from time to time. Talks and even plays may be important. Again the good-will and interest of the controlling authorities will be essential.

3. Television should be used to supplement normal broadcasting. It can be especially valuable for featuring exercises and for giving simple instruction on such things as preparing refuge rooms in the home, what to stockpile, and so on.

4. Cinema is not an easy medium to use. The public pay to go to the cinema to be amused or harrowed, or both, according to taste. They are not very enthusiastic if propaganda or education connected with war and matters of this kind are introduced. Managers, knowing this, are not generally very enthusiastic either. Very short films may however be introduced and be useful, and sometimes the audience could be addressed. But unless there is a period of real tension, brevity is essential.

5. Posters are useful, but normally for advertising something special, e.g. a Civil Defence recruiting drive, a Civil Defence Day, or matters of this kind. It can be expensive, since sites for posters must usually be hired. Care is needed that posters will have the right sort of appeal and be sufficiently arresting to be specially noticed. This method of attracting the attention of the public, while valuable, should not normally be used in isolation, but in conjunction with other media, e.g. the Press, broadcasting etc.

6. Pamphlets are another useful method of disseminating information, though the extent to which they are really studied is problematical. It is probably better to use them in

conjunction with some specific publicity drive during, for example, a Civil Defence Week or recruiting campaign; and to warn the public to expect them and that they contain information of vital importance for their future security. Special mention should be made of a householder's handbook or pamphlet, which should be prepared and issued, if possible, in normal times.

7. National Civil Defence Campaigns are another method of concentrating public attention. They may take various forms. The United States had a Civil Defence Day on the anniversary of Pearl Harbour, and also has a national Exercise "Alert" once a year, lasting about a week. Canada has a Civil Defence Week, and the United Kingdom one or two recruiting drives each year. This method of approach has many advantages in that a national publicity campaign, using all available media, can be concentrated in a short period and be used "to hit" the public. Such campaigns, because of their cost and the effort entailed, can only be held once, or at the most twice, a year. They are not an end in themselves, but rather a striking reinforcement of the steady sustained pressure which is essential.

8. Schools are an excellent media for disseminating information in a suitable form, though it should probably be limited to the age groups capable of understanding and appreciating what they are told. Through the children it may often be possible to secure the interest of the parents, especially if they are resistant to other methods. There has, in some countries, been a prejudice against informing children on these matters, but it is believed that, generally speaking, this prejudice is unreasonable. The United States in particular has initiated a widespread campaign to teach older children the use of monitoring instruments with, it is understood, considerable success.

9. Advertisements, including postal franking, are all useful as complements to some specific campaign. Used by themselves, they probably have little lasting value.

METHODS GIVING A LIMITED APPEAL

10. There are a number of ways in which information, propaganda etc. can be applied on a local as opposed to a national basis. Such methods can be used as adjuncts to a special national campaign, but their chief value is that they can, and indeed should, be a part of the sustained pressure which is so important.

11. Favourable local opportunities should be seized to get publicity and to arouse interest, and any appropriate lessons should be brought home to the public. There is no doubt that Civil Defence personnel especially can do a great deal to help, and not least in private conversations.

12. Among the ways which have proved useful may be mentioned:-

- (i) Civil Defence exhibitions, static and mobile, and shop window displays.
- (ii) Civil Defence demonstrations and exercises when they are specially staged for the public.
- (iii) Civil Defence parades, and participation of Civil Defence in parades to celebrate some national occasion, e.g. Armistice or Liberation Days.
- (iv) Participation of Civil Defence personnel in peacetime disasters or bad accidents. Especially important to demonstrate the value of training.

13. The suggestions made above are not exhaustive, but are intended to be illustrative of ways in which the process of education and information can be steadily pursued. It is especially important to stress at all times the ways in which the public are involved, and especially what are their responsibilities. The Civil Defence authorities should make a special point, at all times, to emphasise this part of Civil Defence, which is what it really is, and lose no opportunity of propaganda and training to this end.

14. The responsibility for the publicity, training etc. will rest on the central and local governmental authorities, but should be taken up by industry and all other private or government interests (if they are independent Corporations) concerned. Governments may use outside agencies to help, and indeed this practice has much to commend it, vide the success of the Netherlands B.B.B. Organization. There is no doubt that to be effective, it is almost essential for governments to be advised by those whose business it is to influence public opinion. Normal government methods are not always the most suitable for the task in hand, and although there must be limits to the commercialisation of government information and propaganda, a leavening is very valuable.