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Democracy: the Only Atomic-Proof Defense

By CHARLES A. KIMBALL

CAMBRIDGE, Mass.—Responsible, honest and courageous are words seldom used to describe the behavior of government officials these days. Yet such language would not be inappropriate to describe a recent action by the City Council of Cambridge, Mass.—publication last week of a 10-page booklet entitled "Cambridge and Nuclear Weapons." Its central message is that the best civil defense is a political offense.

The booklet was prepared in response to the Civil Defense Plan for Cambridge released earlier in the year by the Massachusetts State Civil Defense Agency.

The "brain trust" of Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology makes Cambridge a prime target in a nuclear attack. Recognizing this, civil-defense planners drew up a plan for the city's evacuation. This plan, which is absurd to the point of being laughable, is valuable only as a source of comic relief for those of us who cannot ignore the immobilizing fear that nuclear confrontation grows ever more probable.

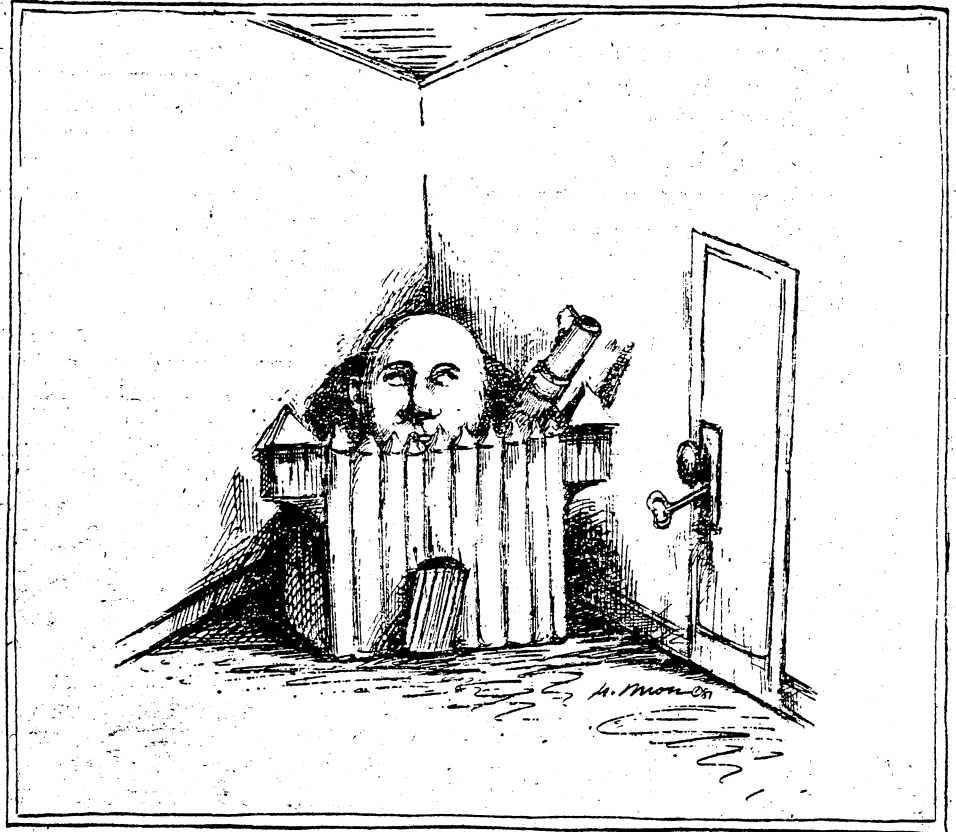
In case of nuclear war, the booklet advises, Cambridge citizens are to gather their money and valuable documents (bank books, wills, deeds, credit cards, etc.), load the family in the car and drive out Route 2 through Lexington and Concord to the "host" community of Greenfield, about 75 miles to the northwest. Presumably, "host" families in Greenfield will be advised on how to greet the Cambridge evacuees and welcome them into their homes.

The state plan is sensitive to those nagging little problems that someone inevitably mentions in time of impending disaster. For instance, what do you do with your pets? Be warned, the host family is not expected to care for your cat or dog. The Cambridge resident is urged, therefore, to leave the animals behind. Of course, the pet owner is encouraged to leave plenty of food and water out for Spot or Fluffy.

To the cynic who doubts the feasibility of an orderly evacuation of a city of nearly 100,000 people, the civil-defense planners have this advice: Should you find yourself in a traffic jam en route to Greenfield, "turn off your engine, remain in your car, listen for official instructions and be patient."

Small wonder that Cambridge City Council member Sandra Graham was dismayed when she saw the state plan: "I thought it was a comic book."

In addition to the absurdity of the specific recommendations, Graham and other council members were alarmed by the calm tone of the state plan. It projected an illusion of safety and survivability. In response, the city council held hearings on the subject. Their conclusions emphasized the futility of



any civil-defense plan. In the words of Councilman David Wylie: "When there are 50,000 nuclear bombs out there, there is no place to hide." In the end, the council determined that the sole means for protecting Cambridge citizens from nuclear warfare was political action aimed at preventing nuclear war through nuclear disarmament and multilateral renunciation of the use of nuclear weapons.

After the hearings, the city council felt a responsibility to act. It ordered that a pamphlet be prepared to inform the citizens of the risks and dangers they all face. In addition, the Cambridge School Committee acted to establish a curriculum to support "children's and young people's understanding of the history, scientific background, economics and politics of waging peace in the nuclear age."

The city's booklet presents a sober account of the nuclear arms buildup (who has or might get atomic weapons, how many there are, how powerful the weapons can be), the known possible effects in the greater Boston area if a single one-megaton bomb were dropped on Cambridge City Hall, and, finally, what citizens can do to promote the possibility for peace.

The booklet urges citizens to get involved: "You may or may not agree with the city council, but try and reach your own conclusion. Do not assume that someone else can be smarter than you about this."

Citizens are urged to begin discussions at home, in church, at school, and to write President Reagan and other elected representatives.

The Cambridge City Council has dared to think about the unthinkable. These nine people decided that uninformed or wishful thinking simply would not do. They faced squarely the most ominous and frightening issue of our day. And they have dealt with it in a responsible and honest manner.

The United States is embarking on the most massive military buildup in history. Our government plans to spend between \$1.5 trillion and \$1.7 trillion dollars on "defense" in the next five years. Will this make us more secure? The Reagan Administration says it will. And yet modern history offers no example of the cultivation by rival powers of armed force on a huge scale that did not in the end lead to an outbreak of hostilities. What makes us believe that we are greater or wiser than our ancestors?

The Cambridge City Council has set an example for other cities, and, more important, it has reminded us that in a democracy we are the government. It is our responsibility to decide what we believe is best for ourselves, our families and our country, and to so inform those who represent us.

Charles A. Kimball is a doctoral candidate in comparative religion at Harvard University and a resident of Cambridge.

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An American City Sees Absurdity

By Charles A. Kimball

The writer is a doctoral candidate in comparative religion at Harvard University and a resident of Cambridge.

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — Responsibility and courage are qualities that are not often credited to government officials these days, yet they apply to a recent action by the city council of Cambridge, Mass., which has published a 10-page booklet entitled "Cambridge and Nuclear Weapons." The central message is that the best civil defense is a political offense.

The booklet was prepared in response to a Civil Defense Plan for Cambridge released earlier in the year by the Massachusetts State Civil Defense Agency.

On the premise that the "brain trust" of Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology makes Cambridge a prime target in a nuclear attack, civil defense planners drew up a plan for the city's evacuation.

In case of nuclear war, it advises, Cambridge citizens are to gather their money and valuable documents, load the family in the car and drive out on Route 2 through Lexington and Concord to the "host" community of Greenfield, about 75 miles to the northwest. Presumably, "host" families in Greenfield will be advised how to welcome the eva-

cuees into their homes. The plan warns that the host family cannot be expected to accept evacuees' pets.

For those who doubt the feasibility of an orderly evacuation of a city of nearly 100,000 people, the civil defense planners have this advice: Should you find yourself in a traffic jam en route to Greenfield, "turn off your engine, remain in your car, listen for official instructions and be patient."

Said city council member Saundra Graham of the state plan: "I thought it was a comic book."

In addition to the absurdity of

Time to dare thinking about the unthinkable.

specific recommendations, Graham and other council members were alarmed by the matter-of-fact tone of the state plan. It projected an illusion of safety and survivability.

The city council held hearings, and the conclusions emphasized the futility of any civil defense plan. In the words of Councilman David Wylie: "When there are 50,000 nuclear bombs out there, there is no place to hide." In the end, the council determined that the sole means for protecting Cambridge citizens from nuclear warfare was political action aimed at preventing nuclear war through nuclear disarmament

and multilateral renunciation of the use of nuclear weapons.

Feeling a responsibility to act, the council ordered that a pamphlet be prepared to inform citizens of the risks and dangers they all face. And the Cambridge School Committee acted to establish a curriculum to support "children's and young people's understanding of the history, scientific background, economics and politics of waging peace in the nuclear age."

The city's booklet presents a sober account of the nuclear arms buildup (who has or might get atomic weapons, how many there are, how powerful the weapons can be), the known possible effects in the greater Boston area if a single one-megaton bomb were dropped on Cambridge City Hall, and, finally, what citizens can do to promote peace.

The booklet urges citizens to get involved: "You may or may not agree with the city council, but try and reach your own conclusion. Do not assume that someone else can be smarter than you about this." Citizens are urged to begin discussions at home, in church, at school, and to write President Reagan and other elected representatives.

The nine-member Cambridge City Council has dared to think about the unthinkable. In so doing, it gives a reminder that in a democracy, the people are the government.

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SAUNDRA GRAHAM
CAMBRIDGE City Council

12 Inman Street, #11
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26 September, 1981

City Council Members
Cambridge City Council
City Hall
Cambridge, MA 02139

Dear Council Members:

Enclosed is a copy of an article I wrote for the Los Angeles Times this past week. I published it in the Times because it has the third largest circulation in the country. And, it has a wire service from which some 450 papers take articles, editorials, etc. So, the article appeared in a number of other papers across the land.

In addition, the article was published in the International Herald Tribune*last Monday, the 21st. The Herald Tribune, which is considered the best English-language daily in international circles, is available in some 40 to 50 countries.

I was moved to write the article when I learned of the honest and courageous action of the City Council. It seemed to me your action deserved more attention than a short blurb in the local papers. I did not, however, imagine that my article would get the widespread exposure it has received.

As a Cambridge resident, I thank you for your responsible action. I pray that other city and town councils, as well as individual citizens, will take a cue from your endeavor and decide to get actively involved in peacemaking.

With warm regards,


Charles A. Kimball

Xerox copies to:

Francis H. Duehay, Mayor
Leonard Russell, Vice Mayor
Kevin P. Crane
Thomas W. Danehy
✓ Saundra Graham
David Sullivan
Walter J. Sullivan
Alfred E. Vellucci
David A. Wylie

*The version published in the International Herald Tribune appeared under the title, "An American City Sees Absurdity".

Thanks again for your assistance. Best wishes in the upcoming election!

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