

# Forcing Labour into the bunkers

THE HOME OFFICE last week revealed its plans to fight back against Labour Councils and other authorities who have declared themselves 'nuclear-free'. Their resistance to civil defence plans was responsible for the cancellation of 'Hard Rock', the civil defence exercise planned for early October.

The government is drafting a series of new regulations under the 1948 Civil Defence Act. If they are agreed by Parliament, they will force local authorities to:

- Build and maintain a bunker headquarters;
- Train employees of local authorities to do civil defence tasks, whether they like it or not;
- Take part in exercises like *Hard Rock*, however absurd they may be;
- Link up with voluntary organisations like 'Civil Aid', the Scouts and the Guides, as well as established groups like the Red Cross.

Local authorities have been sent details of the Home Office propo-

sals for 'consultation', which lasts until 10 December. Thereafter, the Home Office has said, it wants to rush the new regulations through Parliament before the end of the year. But so far local authorities have not been shown the actual regulations.

A letter containing details of the regulations was rushed out last Wednesday, just in time for Home Office minister Patrick Mayhew to make a speech on the subject to a fringe meeting at the Tories' Brighton Conference.

The new regulations will still face a major legal difficulty even if they are passed by Parliament. The difficulty was identified in a QC's report prepared for the Greater London Council last July. This pointed out that before any authority obeyed the government by making civil defence plans, the government had first to provide details of the likely pattern of attack. Since this would mean implicitly confirming that its 'stay-at-home' advice in the derided *Protect and Survive* pamphlet was an invitation to nuclear suicide, the Home Office may well be reluctant to give exact details of the kind, of attack it expects.

**Duncan Campbell**