

Digging in against chemical warfare

AN UNDERGROUND bunker in residential London is being extensively modernised to protect military personnel against chemical and biological attack as well as nuclear explosion. This is the first time that the Ministry of Defence has prepared for a major chemical attack against a London military headquarters — in this case an air defence centre. Despite expecting that the residential area will be a target of chemical or biological attacks, no provision has been made to specially protect, or evacuate, the residents of the target area.

The bunker is 250 yards from the nearest housing at Bentley Priory near Stanmore. It was built in 1939 as an RAF headquarters. Early in 1983 local residents began to ask why a massive excavation was going on at the site. Eventually the MoD told them that it was 'necessary to enlarge and modernise the (air defence) centre at Bentley Priory to provide the facilities needed for the computers and displays for the new Air Defence System.' It was, they said, just a 'fairly large civil engineering project.'

In fact, as documents from the Property Services Agency, shown to the *New Statesman*, reveal, a major feature of the engineering work is the construction of a new decontamination block. Anyone entering the bunker will first have to pass through a six-room nuclear, biological and chemical decontamination zone. Plans show that four decontamination booths will hold troughs of Fuller's Earth, a simple chemical compound used to absorb traces of nerve gases or other chemical or biological weapons. There is also equipment to remove radioactive fallout.

The bunker redevelopment — described as the 'UKADGE SADO' — will cost £3.42 million (the initials stand for Standby Air Defence Operations Centre of the UK Air Defence Ground Environment System). The main block of the underground bunker is two storeys deep and measures 50 feet by 180 feet. It has 50 rooms covering more than 20,000 square feet. It contains a kitchen, canteen and chemical toilets for prolonged occupation when the water supply has ended.

The renovated bunker also incorporates special electronic shielding called 'Tempest'. Two new computer rooms will be entirely surrounded by Tempest metal screens, which stop electronic pulses getting out to waiting spies, and protect them against the electro-magnetic pulse from a nuclear explosion.

Official Home Office policy calls for local residents to stay put in their homes and build their own nuclear shelters. But no official advice is available on civilian defence

against chemical attack. Nor is there any provision for mass production of respirators against gas attack.

The Bentley Priory's Standby Air Defence Operations Centre, which the Ministry of Defence acknowledges to be a major UK military target, would take over in the event of the destruction or disablement of the new underground RAF headquarters which is now under construction on National Trust land near High Wycombe. The two are directly linked, and to the Air Defence Data Centre, at West Drayton near Heathrow Airport.

Duncan Campbell

Five inquiries on Welsh civil rights

NO FEWER than five inquiries are to be held into the police's handling of the Welsh explosives trial which ended with the acquittal of five defendants on charges of conspiracy (NS 25 November 1983).

Attorney General Sir Michael Havers is to hold an inquiry into why the defendants were held without trial for so long. Two of those acquitted of all charges had been held for line and six months, and the one defendant found guilty (of possessing explosives with intent to cause an explosion) had been held for 17 months before the trial.

Amnesty International was so concerned about the length of time the defendants spent in custody it sent an observer to the trial at Cardiff crown court, and will be producing its own report.

The South Wales police are holding an investigation into allegations of harassment made by defendants, which is being conducted by an assistant chief constable of another force, Merseyside. This report will not necessarily be made public, but South Glamorgan Police Authority earlier this month asked for a full internal investigation into the conduct of the case, which it could then publish. Labour member Michael Antoniw said the force's honesty and integrity had been called into question, and his motion calling for the investigation was carried unanimously.

The fifth and most wide ranging study of the case will be a 'public inquiry' organised in Cardiff at the end of February by the Welsh Campaign for Civil and Political Liberties. Phil Thomas, a law lecturer at Cardiff University and spokesperson for the Campaign, said he hoped the inquiry would look at the whole question of political policing in Wales.

The inquiry will be chaired by Lord Gifford, a radical barrister, and counsel and solicitors in the