

Home Office admits: Yes, it's our hole again

AS PART of a new system of civil defence bunkers, the Home Office is to construct three new bunkers for civil servants and other officials. The new system, which the Home Office plans to announce publicly in the next few months, will be the eighth reorganisation of the government's national bunker network since 1950.

Officials claim the new plan, which will create 21 protected sites – to be known as Zone Headquarters – throughout the UK, will streamline the bunker network and actually reduce the number of officials with places in 'protected headquarters'. But, despite the multiplicity of plans, none of the bunker networks of the last 25 years has actually been completed before the system was changed. And previous schemes have produced a litter of disused bunkers across the countryside.

Although the exact locations of the new bunkers are still classified, one of them was discovered last month as an unintended result of an attempt to ridicule CND supporters by a Conservative MP. It is at Chilmark, west of Salisbury, and

will cost over £1.5 million to complete. Chilmark is already the site of a 13-acre underground RAF ammunition store. The new bunker is being built on the surface, adjacent to the main London-Exeter railway line. The Home Office's contractors, Ernest Ireland Construction, identify the secret site only as the 'Salisbury Crown Building'.

Planning permission for a so-called 'Government communications centre' at Chilmark was first applied for in 1976 – but nobody had noticed until now. At the end of last November, however, Conservative MP for Salisbury Mr Robert Key asked Defence Secretary Michael Heseltine to confirm that the 'large hole being dug outside RAF Chilmark is, in fact, a septic tank'. Key intended to ridicule suspicions being spread by CND supporters – but the Defence Secretary confessed only to a 'yawning gap in my own intelligence gathering system. I have no knowledge of these events'.

Soon afterwards, the Home Office admitted that 'we can confirm that it is our hole'. It would be an emergency 'administrative

centre'. Government sources confirmed to the *New Statesman* last week that an existing bunker covering this part of southern England, at Ullenwood near Cheltenham, would be closed as and when the replacement site became available.

Under the new scheme, Britain will be divided into 11 Home Defence Regions, each of which, except London, will have two alternative 'Zone Headquarters' (see map). The two Zone Headquarters (ZHQs) will share responsibility for governing each region. Scotland and Northern Ireland, previously autonomous regions, have now been integrated into the English emergency government control system.

During a pre-war crisis, 11 junior government ministers would be appointed as Regional Commissioners by Royal Warrant, and given total power in their regions. Each Commissioner would choose one of the region's two Zone HQs as a base. A civil service deputy would run the other ZHQ. If one Zone Headquarters is knocked out, the surviving HQ can then rule the whole region. Chilmark will probably be ZHQ7/1 in this system.

Besides the Zone headquarters, the new plan provides for 'reserve teams' of specially appointed government officials to be evacuated from London and other cities to safe areas which the government has already preselected in the countryside. About 5,000-10,000 officials would be evacuated.

The 1984 network of ZHQs replaces a system of Sub-Regional Headquarters (SRHQs) which has been in operation for more than a decade. There have previously been systems of 'Regional War Rooms', 'Sub Regional Controls' and 'Regional Seats of Government'.

Two other new ZHQs will be located in the north of Wales (probably called ZHQ8/2) and in the Lancashire or Cumbria area (ZHQ10/1). Sites for these bunkers have yet to be found. The new bunker in the northwest will replace an existing SRHQ below DHSS offices in Southport, which repeatedly gets flooded.

Each of the former SRHQs was intended to hold 180-200 officials. But the new Home Office plans are claimed to 'reduce considerably' the numbers who would go into each of the 21 ZHQs. Under plans formulated in 1972, however, about 300 additional senior civil servants, each ranked Principal or above, would also be evacuated to safe areas in each region. Other key officials would be sent to the Cabinet Office's bunker, the Central Government War HQ, at Hawthorn near Bath. Part of the Hawthorn complex is also now being refurbished.

Duncan Campbell

Falklands censorship continues



Lieut. David Tinker: 'pointless war'

THE FALKLANDS WAR may have ended over 18 months ago, but the censorship goes on. The Royal Navy has banned officers and men from taking part in a BBC programme about the Falklands War, to be broadcast next week, and tried to prevent Navy wives and naval dockyard workers from appearing on the programme.

In a 'signal' (circular) Vice-Admiral David Brown, Flag Officer Plymouth, said that the restriction on forces personnel commenting in public on government policy meant they were not allowed to accept the BBC's invitation to take part in the filming of a play about the Falklands and an audience discussion afterwards.

But pressure was also put on Navy wives, and on civilian Ministry of Defence employees in Plymouth docks, who had also been invited to take part. Several dockers agreed to take part in the programme, with their wives, but then pulled out.

Some wives refused to take part in the programme, implying that to do so would damage their husbands' career prospects, although in the discussion on the programme a Navy wife disagreed and said she was not restricted.

Yet a recently retired Marine said: 'Certainly in branches of the service which are involved more deeply in more secretive types of work, your wife's opinions mean an awful lot and can certainly mar your career prospects.'

In fact *Falkland Sound to Plymouth Sound* (BBC2, 2 February) has been obstructed by the authori-

