

RADIATION RISKS - ANOTHER GOVERNMENT COVER-UP

In 2001, Michael Meacher, the Environment Minister at that time, set up a committee to look into the health risks of radioactive materials ingested or otherwise taken into the body. These substances are known to cause illnesses which include leukaemias, cancers and birth defects. The committee was established in response to concerns that the existing Government methods of assessing such risks were inaccurate, being based on short, high doses of radiation such as received by victims of the nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, whereas most of the risks in the UK are from long-term exposure to lower levels of radiation from nuclear plants such as Sellafield. CERRIE (Committee Examining Radiation Risks from Internal Emitters), was given a remit "to consider the present risk models for radiation and health that apply to exposure to radiation from internal radionuclides in the light of recent studies and any further research that might be needed".

The Government gave assurances that CERRIE would be independent of the much-criticised COMARE (Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment) (see *May-June '04 issue of WPJN*), and that any disagreements between the scientific experts, nuclear industry representatives and green representatives on the committee would be used to recommend areas for further research. However, there has been a concerted effort to suppress the views of two committee members from Wales, Richard Bramhall and Chris Busby, who have refused to put their names to the main committee report.

The trouble allegedly started after Michael Meacher was sacked from the Government in the Spring of 2003. According to Bramhall and Busby, the committee was soon taken over by pro-nuclear members intent on stifling all opposition. One member of the committee's secretariat, Marion Hill, an experienced radiation protection specialist, resigned in protest earlier this year, accusing other members of the committee of marginalising the views of Bramhall and Busby. She is quoted in the *Sunday Times* (August 1st) as saying, "It is a complete failure when you have a scientific committee that is not allowed to write anything about disagreements over science."

Bramhall and Busby of the LLRC (Low Level Radiation Campaign), say that recent drafts of CERRIE's report ignore overwhelming evidence which shows that the existing risk model underestimates risk by a factor of several hundred. This is illustrated very clearly by studies of infant leukaemia rates in various countries after Chernobyl, all of which show a sharp increase. Richard Bramhall writes: "The chances that these increases in so many countries at the same time could happen randomly are vanishingly small. Recent drafts of the main report reveal a desperation to dismiss it, partly by minimising statistical significance, partly by plain denial. Some of the studies are ignored, wrong doses are used for Germany, and the reliability of Greek cancer registration data has been questioned without substantiation... On the basis of all this fudging the main report says leukaemia was indeed increased but only at the level predicted by current risk models." Bramhall goes on to say that the current model predicts an increased risk of 40% for a foetal dose of 10,000 microSieverts, whereas estimated doses of just 80 microSieverts to

unborn babies after Chernobyl appear to have caused an increase of 260% in leukaemias in Scotland and Wales.

An unnamed committee member who supports CERRIE's majority report, is quoted in the *Sunday Times* article as saying, "we could not be associated with a minority report that was factually wrong, so it was referred to the lawyers," following which DEFRA lawyers wrote to all members of the committee warning them that if the minority report were published all members might be held liable for any libels or negligent misstatements it might contain. It is reasonable to conclude that this letter may well have influenced the votes of some committee members, as no doubt was its intent.



CERRIE members (Busby front L; Bramhall absent)

After many requests from Bramhall and Busby for more information about the charges against them, members were eventually referred to six alleged inaccuracies just before the committee voted to suppress the minority report. According to Bramhall and Busby, the so-called "factual inaccuracies" in their report include: reporting on an area of scientific debate which the committee was unable to resolve (they argue that this is exactly what the committee should be reporting); mentioning the cancellation without adequate explanation of a CERRIE study of cancers around Bradwell Nuclear Power Plant (which they say is exactly what happened); reporting the Secretariat's role in the biased drafting of the main report (likewise); including a table of doses of Uranium Oxide which has been in the public domain for years (and which the committee critics have said is wrong without saying why); finally, noting that no data had been obtained from WCISU (Wales Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit). Of this last charge, Bramhall says that the way they reported this fact could have been challenged, but no-one on the committee had in fact raised this point; had it been raised, they would have been happy to change the wording. The final alleged inaccuracy in the minority report has mysteriously now been included in the main report.

As we reported in the July-August edition of *WPJN*, there are very worrying clusters of cancers along the Menai Strait. It must be extremely upsetting and distressing for those affected to learn that a committee set up to independently study clusters such as this is resorting to threats and censorship to prevent open discussion of areas of disagreement amongst its members. Now that the story is in the public domain, it is to be hoped that truth and openness prevail and that the minority report is published along with the main report. Michael Meacher, who originally set up the committee is said to be "furious" and has written to the current Environment Minister Elliott Morley demanding an explanation. No reply has been received to date (mid August).

ANOTHER GOVERNMENT COVER UP

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Write to your MP asking him/her to sign Early Day Motion 1548, which asks for COMARE to be scrapped and replaced with a new and balanced committee.

People who have any information about cancer cases, especially children along the North Wales coast, should contact Cheryl Carlisle, Pandyffryn, 432 Abergele Road, Old Colwyn, Conwy, LL29 9AH, raycarlisle@supanet.com. Cheryl was featured in an article in the Daily Post 16th Aug 2004 and is collecting data on this issue.

Contact the Low Level Radiation Campaign to go on their mailing list. LLRC is also desperate for funds. Please consider making a donation to this vital work. The address is: Richard Bramhall, LLRC, bramhall@llrc.org, The Knoll, Montpellier Park, Llandrindod Powys LD1 5LW U.K. Tel: 01597 824771.

www.llrc.org

www.cerrie.org

OUT IN THE WASH

A small US clothing company trading in France offers interesting information on its washing advice labels. Translated, they read:

- Wash with warm water
- Use mild soap
- Dry flat
- Do not use bleach
- Do not dry in the drier
- Do not iron
- We are sorry that our President is an idiot
- We did not vote for him

COURT OF APPEAL APPROVES TORTURE

Last month, the Court of Appeal endorsed the use of torture to gain evidence against suspected terrorists. International human rights groups and specialists in international law will continue to campaign against this decision, which they say has effectively given Britain the go-ahead to trawl for evidence from tortured detainees worldwide.

The case was brought to the Court of Appeal by ten foreign nationals who have been held without charge and without trial in British jails for over two years under Blunkett's emergency laws. None of these men has been accused of committing a terrorist act; they have only been accused of belonging to banned terrorist organisations.

Two senior judges ruled that the Home Secretary has the right to detain suspects such as these on the basis of evidence obtained from prisoners who have been tortured in US detention camps like Guantanamo Bay.

Groups campaigning against this travesty of justice include:

Voices in the Wilderness UK: www.voicesuk.org

Campaign Against Criminalising Communities:

www.cacc.org.uk

Amnesty International:

www.amnesty.org

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