

SALEM PSR

Recently the children and I drove to Salem, the Oregon state capitol, for a debate with the local Physicians for Social Responsibility, PSR, representative. Salem is about a four hour drive north of Cave Junction and is currently inhabited by a state governor who has the worst reputation among the 50 state governors as regards his opposition to civil defense.

Encouraged by their success with this governor, the PSR is pushing an ambitious program in the state legislature with their nuclear age curriculum and with the hope of making permanent Oregon's refusal to cooperate in the President's civil defense program as operated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA.

In this atmosphere, we were fortunate indeed to be invited to debate the PSR at a meeting of about 40 emergency managers from various counties in Oregon. As usual, the organizers did not call this a "debate". Many Americans in our current age of relativism do not like the word "debate". It sounds confrontational - as though there were firm and opposite sides to any issue. In any case, it was a debate with rather loose rules of procedure.

In talking with my opponent before the debate, I learned that he is neither a physician nor a scientist nor an educator. He is a psychologist who is hired by the PSR to lobby the Oregon state legislature. He claimed to me privately that about 1,000 Oregon physicians are members of the PSR. Later, when he was asked about this during his presentation, the number had risen to 2,000.

His presentation was the usual party line. Defense is warlike. Emergency disaster hospitals are civil defense in disguise and might lead Americans to be more reckless in initiating a nuclear war. Efforts to design defenses against biological or chemical warfare agents make war more "thinkable" and, therefore, should not be permitted.

He even had an early edition of *Nuclear War Survival Skills* which he waved at the audience in ridicule saying it was filled with errors. He seemed especially perturbed by the picture of two college girls sitting happily in their completed shelter.

I asserted that there was not a single error in the entire book and challenged him to point out even one error as an example. He then quickly changed the subject.

He also claimed that the United States Department of Defense spends its time threatening the Soviets with the American civil defense system. Appropriately, during this part of his presentation, he was waving an Oak Ridge National Laboratory translation of a *Soviet* civil defense manual at the audience. He had no comparable American document, nor did he have even one page to back his claim.

Apparently Department of Defense, DOD, bashing is popular in the circles in which he moves whether or not you have any facts. Since the American civil defense system today consists of some partly finished evacuation plans, a little inadequate communications and radiation monitoring equipment, the distribution of *Nuclear War Survival Skills* plus some pamphlets on permanent shelters, and a small number of dedicated professionals without