

ATOMIC BOMB SHELTERS?

To safeguard the lives and health of the people under its care is one of the prime functions of government. Operating on this premise, the Department of City Planning, with the approval of Mayor O'Dwyer, has been studying the question of providing bomb shelters for the city's population. Recognizing that the question is larger than local, it has projected its thinking into national scope, and reaches the conclusion that a minimum of 10,000,000 persons in the crowded areas of larger cities need shelters.

The study puts a tentative price tag of perhaps \$2,000,000,000 on this protection, of which about \$450,000,000 would be needed here. A principal feature of the program would be shelters of heavy concrete built under public parks, and it is felt that use as automobile parking garages would not only make these shelters of great peacetime benefit in congested areas but would also help pay for them. Encouragement or compulsion of provision for additional shelter space in buildings old and new, in crowded areas, is also suggested.

Since the capital for such a program as this would probably have to originate in Washington, the decision ultimately rests with our military leaders and Congress. The City Planning Commission members who worked on this study believe they have something that is practicable, can be completed within a reasonable time, and that is needed in view of the world situation. Some elements that will go into our thinking on the way to a decision are, first, whether \$2,000,000,000 so used would be a better investment, for our common safety, than if the same money were used some other way, also for defense; whether the concrete shelter is the best defense of civilians in this city; whether our military and diplomatic estimates of the future are so gloomy that it is essential to have some place to hide; whether New York would actually be an early target in an enemy atomic bombing, if the enemy's bomb supply is small.

If the various other preparations under way for civilian defense in the event of attack are justified, it is certainly reasonable to raise the question of shelters, even if they are to be dismissed, after prayerful consideration, in favor of taking a legitimate, calculated risk. Chairman Finkelstein, in submitting this report to the Mayor, does not presume to have all the answers. Against the atomic bomb there is no complete or satisfactory answer. He has given us an outline of what he and his associates think one partial answer might be. From there on it becomes, it seems to us, a question of national policy, to be considered with the advice of military and atomic experts.