

# HANCOCK Youngsters' fear of nuclear war disputed

## Experts debate depth of concern

New York Times

BOSTON — Psychiatrists, educators and doctors allied in a desire to halt the nuclear arms race have found themselves in dispute over how deeply young people are frightened by the danger of nuclear war and what effect it has on their lives.

The issue was highlighted last week when Brown University undergraduates voted to ask the school to stock poison so students could commit suicide in case of nuclear war. The referendum is not binding on Brown's administration, which has rejected the idea.

Several experts say the Brown vote is only the latest evidence that there is a large and growing concern among children and teen-agers that they may be killed by a nuclear exchange before they grow up. Some specialists also argue that this anxiety has contributed to the rise of drug and alcohol abuse among American youth.

But Robert Coles, an author and child psychiatrist who teaches at the Harvard Medical School, said he believed fears of nuclear war were largely confined to children of liberal, affluent parents, themselves concerned about nuclear war.

"My heart is with the freeze, so this has gotten me into a jam," Coles said.

Dr. John Mack, also a professor of psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School, said, "What comes through in all the studies of the subject is that a considerable percentage of teen-agers are frightened about the nuclear situation."

"Many children feel they are living on the brink of annihilation and are afraid they won't grow up," Mack contended. He was the leader of a panel of the American Psychiatric Association that studied attitudes about nuclear war among 1,000 high school and elementary school students in the Boston area over the past few years.

"I get calls from parents and teachers all the time who have kids that are very worried about dying in a nuclear

war," added Mack, who is a peace activist himself. Recently, he said, the parents of a 6-year-old boy in suburban Brookline told him the boy became frightened when he heard an airplane overhead and asked his older brother if it was a bomber carrying nuclear weapons.

But Coles said children respond "to the concerns of their parents."

"The more I talk with children, the more I think social class and economic background and the parents' values are extremely important in determining the degree of concern children have about nuclear war," he said.

Coles, who has interviewed 108 children at length over the past few years about their fears of nuclear war, said he did not find much concern among "ghetto children, children of working class families, or children in Georgia, Alabama and New Mexico."

Moreover, Coles asserted that there was an important difference between saying children are afraid of nuclear war and showing that this anxiety has an actual effect on their lives.

"Most of the research that's been done on this subject is just based on questionnaires given to kids," he said. To find out what the impact is, "you have to spend days and months doing interviews with the kids, their families and their schools."

"I think there have been too many generalities without hard research," Coles said. "I'm afraid this is an issue

where there has been political use made of research."

He said he was also concerned that the nuclear freeze movement had allowed itself "to become a class issue, confined to the liberal upper class community."

"In the minds of a lot of working people I visit, the freeze has stirred up a lot of class resentment."

Coles said a worker he knows in the General Electric jet engine factory in Lynn, north of Boston, "was furious at the Brown students."

Coles said the worker told him: "Those spoiled rich kids — everyone else is going to suffer a slow death and they want a quick way out."

Coles said he thought some peace activists, particularly Helen Caldicott, the founder of Women's Action for Nuclear Disarmament, were actually hurting the movement by their actions. "When she gets up and tells people it is a mathematical certainty you will be dead in four years if Reagan is re-elected, that makes people angry," he charged.

Dr. Caldicott, an Australian-born pediatrician, set off an angry dispute in Maine this month when she told stu-

dents at a junior high school in Yarmouth that if the arms race was not stopped, "you aren't going to grow up." Reports in several Maine newspapers said a number of the students were reduced to tears and their parents were outraged.

Dr. Caldicott went on to call President Reagan a "wimp" and Republican Sen. William S. Cohen of Maine a "corporate prostitute" because of his support of certain weapons systems.

Dr. Caldicott was speaking on behalf of Elizabeth H. Mitchell, Cohen's Democratic opponent for the Senate, but Mrs. Mitchell, who has made ending the arms race a major theme of her campaign, later apologized for Dr. Caldicott's remarks.

Dr. Caldicott insisted that her rapport with the children had been excellent and attributed the uproar to "the parent's reaction when they heard about it afterward — they don't want to think about it," she said.

She argues in her book, "Missile Envy," published earlier this year, that a main reason children are dropping out and indulging in drugs and alcohol is their pessimism about the future.

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