Michal Ulvr

Abstract

It was the near-end of the Second World War, which defined the popular reception of the Atomic bomb for upcoming decade. In the first year of the nuclear monopoly, the feeling of uncertainty and fear of death in the nuclear war was not yet present in strength. The mood of relative safety dominated the American society till the fall of the monopoly in 1949. Since the first atomic explosion occurred in the USSR, the atmosphere of fear, that never faded back and was latent since August and September 1945, made an exuberant appearance in press and other media. Suddenly, the American government made (after years of neglect) a great effort to calm down the uncertainty of the public. A Federal Civil Defense Administration was established at the end of 1950 and provided more or less useful information, propaganda, material and logistical support for a war with the Soviet Union, which was expected to come sooner or later. Plenty of educational and propaganda pamphlets, books and training films were produced in determination to make it clear, that survival under nuclear attack was possible. And indeed, at that time, there was even a good chance, that keeping some basic survival rules in mind an individual could come out of a nuclear attack relatively unscathed. Administration even tried to convince the Americans to stay in the bombed out and polluted cities to sustain the industrial production. The situation changed suddenly when Russia tested its first thermonuclear bombs. The destructiveness and killing potential of these weapons was beyond comparison with the “ordinary” nuclear devices. Complete annihilation of American cities with suburbs, irradiation of soil and megadeaths were connected to the real possibility of the thermonuclear war. The radioactive fallout was suddenly an issue too big to play down and the Lucky Dragon incident made it finally quite clear, that it is much more dangerous than many previously published materials suggested. A wave of fear gathered its power during the second half of the fifties and finally culminated during Kennedy administration. Many Americans went to great lengths to protect lives of themselves and their families. Some of them even built a fallout shelter with a price tag of a new luxurious car or a house. The same fear played a major role in politics too. In 1958 Kennedy raised the missile gap issue during his re-election campaign for the senate and again during the presidential election of 1960. Lesser known is the much more important role played by the fear from the possibility of the atomic war during the presidential primaries and election in 1964.
The primary goal of this dissertation thesis was to analyze the official government statements, information mediated and modified by newspaper, newsreels, radio, movie industry and television related to the crucial events of the nuclear issues of the first two decades of the cold war. The secondary goal was the examination of the electronic media as the primary source for this particular topic.