

Food Comes First With Survivalists

SURVIVALISTS who are retreating to mountain caves and arming themselves to protect hoards of food suggest how quickly human nature can recede from a high technology society to primitive culture.

Spokesmen for some of these groups have said they would shoot their neighbors to avoid sharing resources with them in event of a military invasion or total collapse of the economy.

That attitude reflects a lack of faith in our country and its institutions. People with such a panicky fear might abandon civilized discipline and resort to barbaric selfishness in time of emergency.

A Gallup poll reported last November asked respondents what institutions they had confidence in. Perhaps nearly all had some confidence in something or other, but the scores for traditional American institutions were alarmingly low.

The church led with 66 percent saying they had "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in it. Banks were next with 60 percent, tapering down for the military,

schools, courts, newspapers, labor, Congress and television, to a low of 29 percent for business.

If citizens lack confidence in their institutions, it should not be surprising if some resort to savagery for survival. The reports did not indicate that survivalists are doing anything in particular to help stave off disasters that would drive them into their caves.

Unfortunately, similar lack of confidence in traditional civilized institutions seems to exist throughout the world. Many countries are headed by leaders without moral scruples or standards, causing untold distress, loss of life and diversion of public funds selfishly.

An American businessman said recently: "Everyone is nine meals away from murder," apparently implying that if available food reserves were distributed equally we might run out within a week.

That might be an overstated point, but food is essential in any struggle for survival, and it is not unusual for nations to take attitudes

like that of the American survivalists. Increased food aid is being demanded as the price for keeping down terrorism and wars. The more we give, the more is demanded of us.

Birth control programs may be slowing population gains but recent estimates indicate that the world still is gaining about 75 million people a year. It is a fact that all of them want to eat.

Studies have shown that only seven countries out of 130 produce more food than their people eat, while one-third of the human race lives in about 50 hungry nations.

What are survivalists and leaders of hungry nations saying to the rest of the world? They are making it clear that if and when a showdown comes they intend to take whatever they need and want, regardless of the needs or rights of other people.

Ultimately, politics as much as food production will determine who will eat and who will go hungry. In such a world, the survivors of a major catastrophe might not necessarily be the more fortunate ones.