

dangerous

by the Alaskans
Against Amchitka

SUMMARY

The planned Cannikin atomic test at Amchitka Island in the Aleutians in October, 1971 is clearly unjustified in terms of the risks involved to human life and to the progress of the SALT talks between the United States and the Soviet Union. Neither the Atomic Energy Commission nor the Department of Defense, the only two federal agencies in favour of the test, have justified the blast in terms of national security. Apparently the warhead of which the test was originally designed is now considered outmoded, and the test is therefore militarily unnecessary. Moreover, the State Department has asked that the test be cancelled until the SALT talks have been concluded so as not to jeopardize whatever progress might be made in those talks.

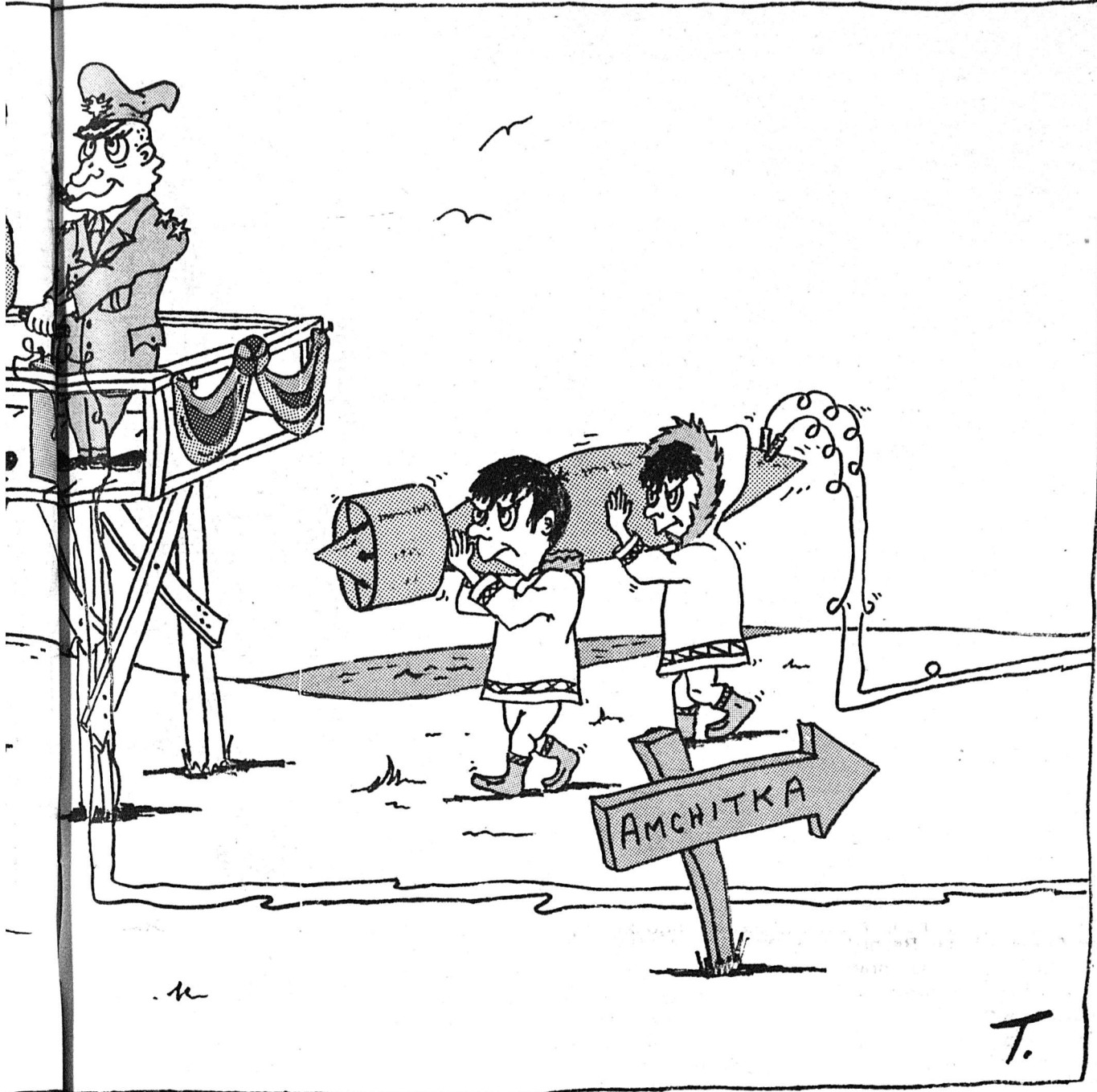
Perhaps more important is the fact that the AEC has not presented convincing evidence that the test is safe. The largest underground tests to date have been 1 megaton; The Cannikin test is to be 5 megatons. The shock wave from the blast may trigger a major earthquake along the Circum-Pacific Seismic Belt, perhaps as far away as the San Andreas Fault in California. Moreover, if the blast does trigger a quake of 7.5 magnitude or greater, a tsunami (tidal wave) is a certainty. The AEC has erred in its predictions of earthquake activity in the past. While in 1964 the AEC stated the underground blasts did not cause quake activity except in unusual circumstances, by 1970 the AEC was forced to admit that underground blasts inevitably cause quake activity. One megaton may not be high enough, 5 megatons may be. It is not known. Moreover, quakes may build on itself and peak as an 8.5 quake, as was the case with the 1964 Good Friday Earthquake in Alaska. The Cannikin blast is expected to generate a shock of 7.0 on the Richter scale.

The AEC has also erred in its predictions of radioactive leakage associated with underground tests. Between 1963 and 1971, seventeen tests at the Nevada test sites leaked radioactivity which was detectable outside the limits of the test site. In at least one instance, fallout in the air was detectable over most of the Western United States; Moreover, the AEC has admitted in its environmental impact statement that while unlikely, radioactive water from the test could leak into the ocean from around Amchitka Island within two or three years. Merely the rumor of contaminated fish in Alaskan waters could destroy the fishing industry of the state for more than a decade. Were the rumor demonstrated to be fact, the industry could be destroyed into the foreseeable future.

The risks of the Cannikin shot are not justified by the declared purpose of the test. It is difficult to judge what circumstances might justify the taking of such risks to the people of Alaska and their environment. But clearly the test, and therefore, have not complied with the spirit of the National Environmental Policy Act which establishes that the destruction of the environment by the government must rest on evidence of compelling necessity. The warhead for which the test was originally designed is now considered obsolete; a low-yield weapon is contemplated instead. Again, the AEC's own high level evaluation

commission, headed by Dr. Kenneth Pitzer (then president of Stanford University) concluded that the need for the Amchitka tests "... should be compelling if they are to be conducted in the face of the possible risks that have been identified".

In conclusion, the Cannikin test blast scheduled for November 1971, on Amchitka Island may trigger a major devastating earthquake, may set in motion a severe destructive tsunami, may impede or erase progress in the strategic arms talks, and is not apparently necessary to national military security. Such an inordinate and unnecessary risk cannot be taken to do so would be to defy reason and intelligent judgment. In the name of the people of Alaska and America, in the interest of human life, for the sake of the mothers of Alaska and their children, it is not worth it.



THE SALT TALKS

The purpose of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks now being conducted in Helsinki, Finland, is to limit the production of nuclear weapons as a step in slowing down the arms race, and thereby reducing the possibility of atomic warfare between the United States and Russia. By going ahead with Cannikin the United States may in fact jeopardize the progress of those talks, progress which has only been achieved in this past year. In an editorial in the "Washington Evening Star" for July 26, 1971, it was revealed that five different federal agencies have recommended against the planned blast on Amchitka (the Department of State, the U.S. Information Agency, the Office of Science and Technology, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Council of Environmental Quality). Primary among these is the State Department, which suggested that at a minimum this test should be delayed until the completion of the SALT talks. It could well be that as a result of the talks we would not need to test atomic weapons any further. Moreover, the test is of international concern from a different standpoint. Already the Canadian government has requested cancellation of the test, on the grounds of proximity to the site as well as progress in the SALT talks. By insisting on carrying out the test the United States seems to suggest defiance of the very purpose of the talks and of the legitimate protests of other governments. Only if the test were clearly and unequivocally necessary to the national security could such defiance be justified

om the original, and therefore intercept an incoming result of CBM or SLBM (submarine-launched ballistic missile) at a higher altitude (see statement of Dr. Jeremy Stone, Federation of American Scientists, in testimony before the AEC hearings in Anchorage, May 28, 1971.) Cannikin was designed to test the larger yeild basic Apartan warhead. This was revealed by Dr. Harold M. Agnew, Director of passage at the Los Alamos (New Mexico) Scientific Laboratory in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on April 20, 1971, in his statements about Cannikin. Alaska Attorney-General John Havelock asked the AEC after May 28 hearings on Cannikin in Anchorage if the national security necessary for the test had been reviewed at the Presidential level in view of this apparent change in strategy. He has not yet received an answer to his question, though an answer was promised. Additionally, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird has not responded to the same question directed to him by letter by Alaska Governor William Egan, a point made by the Anchorage Daily News in an Editorial against the test on Friday, August 13, 1971. The implication clearly is left that the AEC is using the "national security" argument as a blanket authorization for a test which presents grave risks to human life, but which is not in fact necessary militarily. Numerous Senators and Representatives in the Congress have called for cancellation or postponement of the test until the AEC and the Department of Defense consent to answer publically the exact purpose of the Cannikin test at Amchitka in November. (See, for example, Attorney-General Havelock's statement in the Congressional Record for July 29, 1971, and Governor William Egan's letter to Secretary Laird.)