

by Philip Resnick

AMCHITKA

A Political

The planned explosion of a five-megaton nuclear warhead at the bottom of a 6,000-foot hole on Amchitka Island in the Aleutians by the US Atomic Energy Commission is indeed an outrage. This much the wave of protests by concerned citizens, ecology freaks, scientists, trade unions, politicians, and even, unlikely protesters, the Real Estate Board of Vancouver, makes clear.

At least in B.C., all would appear unanimous in their opposition to the most powerful underground nuclear explosion yet conceived, pointing to the potential danger of nuclear radiation leaking into the sea and air, and of seismic shock and tidal waves reaching our shores.

Even the Canadian government, never a forceful critic of American policy, as, through the mouths of its External Affairs and Environment minister, called for the cancellation of the Amchitka blast.

In the United States, as well, various scientists and politicians have attacked this explosion whose total cost is \$190 million, labelling it "a pointless experiment in support of an unnecessary weapon," and "an experiment waiting to be cancelled." With the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks between the United States and the Soviet Union showing signs of progress, and with American policy towards China beginning to shed its twenty-year obsession with containment and anti-communism the logic of the Anti-Ballistic Missile program with its nuclear-tipped rockets is dubious in the extreme.

Yet the AEC and the Pentagon assure the American public that "the alternative to not testing this particular explosive would be to make impossible the development of nuclear weapons technology of significance to our national security requirements." Neither Congress nor Richard Nixon, an old spokesman for the military-industrial complex, are likely to over-rule this.

What has been lacking in so much of the opposition by B.C. and other groups to the Amchitka blast is an elementary understanding of American strategy, of which Amchitka is but a tiny part, and of Canadian support for that strategy ever since 1945. Bodies such as the Real Estate Board of Vancouver or the Liberal Party of B.C., or the Premiers' Conference, meeting at Victoria, which have never been critics of American involvement in Vietnam or of Canada's junior partnership to American military and economic policy, have suddenly become paper tigers over Amchitka.

However, any protest against Amchitka that is to raise people's consciousness and lead to significant change must be directed against the very structures of continentalism and imperialist integration, of which Liberal governments from Mackenzie King's to Trudeau's and provincial

governments such as Bennett's have been a mainstay. A political critique of Amchitka is, therefore, a critique of the colonialism of the Canadian ruling class and a call to militant action.

American strategy since 1945 has been directed at containing both the Soviet Union and China, militarily, economically, and politically, while developing and consolidating a far-flung American Empire. Techniques of American domination have ranged from the deployment of American troops in Germany, Korea, Formosa, and Japan, military intervention is support of right-wing governments in Indo-China and Latin America, subversion and cultural penetration, to economic hegemony through the Marshall Plan, direct capital investment, the multi-national corporation, the reserve position of the dollar, etc.

Beyond these, the United States has developed a fantastic nuclear force, not simply as a defence against "aggressive" Soviet or Chinese policy, but as an instrument for reinforcing its hegemony over the so-called free world.

It was the United States, not the Soviet Union, that first developed atomic weapons, and the military-industrial complex has made sure that the US has largely set the pace of the arms race and nuclear build-up.

The role of Canada in all this has historically been to support the United States. In the post-war period, the Canadian government accepted a defence alliance with the US, in Europe and Asia, as well as in North America, and came to integrate Canadian defence policy, especially air policy, into a continental, i.e. American-controlled, framework.

Canadian troops in Europe and Korea, radar lines in the Canadian Arctic, the North American Air Defence Agreement (NORAD) of 1958, were devices, not of some independent Canadian defence policy, but in support of American cold war objectives. Canadian defence policy was overtly defined as "helping to protect the thermonuclear retaliatory capacity of the United States," and "in the late 1950's and early 1960's Canada was forced into accepting a nuclear role by its alliance with the US, witness the famous Bomarc's.

Continentalism in defence, of course, went hand in hand with continentalism in economics. The post-war period had seen a massive

inflow of American direct investment into Canada and the mortgaging of whole sectors of the Canadian economy, particularly resources, to the US.

In defence, this had the other consequence of continentalism in defence policy, so that their way to Vietnam, even Canadian representatives on the International Control Commission, such as B. J. Brennan, spokesman of the American hard line, to Hanoi.

The point of this brief history is that it sets the context for the defence relations between Canada and the United States, following its policy in Vietnam, inwards in recent years, but as, if anything, an emphasis on defending fortress America, hence the massive expansion of the American nuclear arsenal.

It also heralds greater, not only economic but also political, and redoubled American intervention in Canadian resources and electricity, euphemistically called a continental energy program.

The most significant addition to the American nuclear arsenal in the last few years has been the ABM. The purpose of this elaborate system is to defend existing first and second strike ICBM's between \$5 and \$50 billion annually, it is designed to intercept, to intercept, rockets over northern Canada, shorter Sprint missiles.

The bases for the ABM are in the United States. The US Secretary of Defense, Melvin Belli, was asked by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1969, whether Canada has any voice over the use of the rockets, with H-bombs over her territory, he bluntly replied, "The Government has no veto power of any kind, no veto power. The ABM bases are to the border and the fact that they explode over Canadian soil."