

Cannikin

Unless the Supreme Court intervenes in these last few hours, the largest underground nuclear explosion ever detonated in the United States will be set off—with unknown and incalculable consequences—on the island of Amchitka in the Aleutians this afternoon. If anything goes wrong—and no one involved in this wildly hazardous undertaking can predict with certainty that nothing will go wrong—today could well become known as another “day of infamy” to the peoples bordering the Northern Pacific, Asians and Americans alike.

Of course it is probable that nothing will go wrong, or so the controlling governmental scientists tell us. But the risks are so great, the gains so dubious and the debits already so real that the entire experiment appears to be a ghastly and unnecessary mistake. One cannot help but suspect that this is another example of the immense power of technological inertia. The project is so huge, has been under way for so long a period, involves so many people and so much money, that though it no longer makes even military sense as perhaps it did when first planned, it is beyond the ability (or willingness) of even the President of the United States now to call it off.

The environmental and human damage that could be done by this explosion is immense. Earthquakes, radioactive pollution of air and water, and, most particularly, creation of that huge sea wave known as *tsunami* could result, with devastating effect on human and animal life thousands of miles from the scene of Cannikin, as the test has been so archly named.

The desperate effort of the Committee for Nuclear Responsibility and a half-dozen environmental and other organizations to halt the test through court action has belatedly been echoed in Congress. No less than 100 members of the Canadian Parliament, including at least two Cabinet Ministers, have added their protest to that of thousands of their fellow citizens against this peculiar manifestation of a “good neighbor” policy on the part of the United States.

The Atomic Energy Commission, which is conducting the test, has overridden the objections advanced by many scientists within the Administration itself; and in fact it is essentially on the A.E.C.'s alleged violation of the National Environmental Protection Act that David Sive, a noted environmental lawyer, has made his case.

However, if the Supreme Court fails to intercede today, an underground explosion 250 times greater than that at Hiroshima will take place as planned. Let us pray.