

ALEUTS TESTIFY AGAINST AEC

Testimonies Express Fears of What Might Occur at Detonation

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ANCHORAGE—"When you wake up in the morning, you wake up thinking that you're one day closer to the blast. You think about it when you go to sleep at night. The fear is almost a tangible thing in Unalaska today," testified Philemon Tutiakoff before a U.S. District Court in Anchorage.

He described his native village, which he left only three weeks before, as a place where the fear of what will happen if the 5 megaton Cannikin blast goes off at Amchitka is overwhelming.

Tutiakoff, an Aleut member of the village council at Unalaska testified on behalf of the Aleut League Monday in their suit against the Atomic Energy Commission to stop the commission from exploding its Cannikin blast next month.

On Monday, September 27, the Federal District Court began hearings on the Aleut League motion to prevent the blast.

What they are asking for is a preliminary injunction—an action which would effectively postpone the multi-million dollar high megaton blast.

If this is granted, the Aleut League would then have to prove why the AEC should be permanently enjoined against such atomic testing. No group, and conservationists have tried, has been able to stop an AEC test through court action. The Aleut League hopes they will be able to do it.

As Alaska Legal Services attorney Hugh Fleischer, who is representing the League, began

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presenting his case on Monday he faced a neatly arrayed barrage of AEC administrators and scientific experts—biologists, seismologists, administrators, lawyers and other officials.

Two Aleut witnesses led off the testimony, after a lengthy discussion of whether the U.S. District Court had jurisdiction in the matter. First came Iliodor Philemonof, polished, AFN employed leader of the 3500 member Aleut League.

Philemonof, a native of the Pribilof Island of St. George who lives in Anchorage introduced the court to the concept of his organization, the life style of the isolated Aleutian islands and their land and sea dependent economy.

Then, preceding a barrage of expert witnesses from both the plaintiff and the defense, came Philemon Tutiakoff.

Tutiakoff, a member of the Unalaska City Council, is a short hunchbacked Aleut from that village who is now in Anchorage studying to become a social worker in his village.

He described the reactions of his people to the proposed Cannikin blast as compounded of deep fear and resentment.

Nobody consulted his people, he testified, before they planned actions which may vitally affect or alter their lives and livelihoods.

Other Aleut village councils, he testified, have sent inquiries to Unalaska asking them to join with them in a united front against the blast.

We've got to "do something about it" his people say about Cannikin. Maybe weapons have to be tested, they admit, but why near them?

Maybe not so near, emphasized AEC chief counsel Thomas Fleming in his cross examinations and presentation. He stressed that each of the Aleut villages is at least several hundred miles from Amchitka—the proposed blast site.

Yet, said Tutiakoff, the prospect creates great fear. People in Unalaska experience many, many earthquakes, he said. Yet, they never get used to them. When the icons begin to fall from their places in the church and the ground rolls, they fear each time.

In this modern courtroom dominated by AEC lawyers and

witnesses, sprinkled with spectators wearing red buttons with the message "I'M AG'IN CANNIKIN", the issue of whether the AEC has fulfilled its responsibilities to U.S. law and specifically as regards the Aleut people, will be decided.

The Aleut League planned there expert witnesses on its side—scientists imported from Denver and Cambridge who doubt AEC conclusions from their scientific findings—who think earthquake, tsunami, radiation damage are statistically significant dangers.

"What we want to bring out is that there are important questions still open," commented Hugh Fleischer as the first morning of what looked like a two day hearing drew to a close.

He, as well as many others, had hoped President Nixon would cancel the planned 5 megaton test on the Aleutian island of Amchitka during his visit to Anchorage.

The President did not. So at 9:30 a.m. on a sunny Anchorage Monday, attorneys and witnesses assembled to present their cases.

By Tuesday afternoon, the court planned to end the barrage of witnesses and exhibits and consider motions for dismissal before considering the injunction itself.

The Aleut League claims that the Atomic Energy Commission is violating its authority by acting prejudicially towards their people, among other shortcomings. It claims the arbitrary choice of Amchitka as a blast site threatens the civil rights of their members, violating some specifications of the Environmental Policy Act as well.

Meanwhile, an Aleut man from Unalaska, one of what appeared to be only two native witnesses in a case involving 3500 members of the Aleut League, impressed many spectators by his description of isolation and subsistence living in Atka.

"They're luckier than the people at Unalaska," he said. "They don't have to depend on the store."

There is little cargo service or even mail delivery on Atka. Yet, even there, people have heard about Cannikin—and they fear its effects.