

STATEMENT ON PROJECT CHARIOT

Executive Subcommittee, National Committee on Indian Health
Association on American Indian Affairs

The Executive Subcommittee of the National Committee on Indian Health, of the Association on American Indian Affairs has had under study for some time the available data on Project Chariot, the proposed nuclear excavation at Cape Thompson, Alaska. The project is for the experimental nuclear blasting of a harbor as part of the Plowshare program for peaceful uses of atomic energy. The site was chosen presumably because this region of Alaska is remote from large population centers and sparsely inhabited. There are, however, three Eskimo villages in the vicinity of the proposed explosion. The harbor is not needed and would be allowed to silt in after it has been excavated. A total of about 700 Eskimos live in the three villages. It has been estimated by the Atomic Energy Commission that 20 million cubic yards of dirt will be moved but that the radioactive debris will be so concentrated within the immediate vicinity that the fall-out on the Eskimo villagers will not be dangerous, at least insofar as external radiation from this source is concerned. The Eskimos depend for their subsistence largely on hunting over a wide range, including the area of some square miles which will be made uninhabitable for man and animals over a period of at least some months. Contamination of food and water sources over a much wider area is conceded to be probable. Because the problem is complicated the Subcommittee has until now withheld judgment in recognition particularly of assurances given by spokesman for the A.E.C. to representatives of this Association and to the Eskimos themselves that nothing which might be dangerous to the health and welfare of these inhabitants of the area would be undertaken. These assurances are predicated on the reliability of scientific predictions of what may result from underground atomic explosions of a size which never have been undertaken heretofore.

The size of the proposed Project Chariot blast, as planned, will be of one

charge of 200 kilotons (equivalent to 200,000 tons of TNT) plus four charges of 20 kilotons (or a total power fourteen times the Hiroshima bomb). The predictability of the effects may be doubted, especially in the light of the recent unexpected results of the much smaller detonation (of only 5 kilotons) which went amiss several days ago in a salt cavern in New Mexico. The consequences of error in the tremendously larger Chariot explosions could be correspondingly much more serious.

Whereas the Association on American Indian Affairs and its Health Committee are in no manner opposed to the Flowshare program in general, they have been deeply concerned about the possible hazards to the Eskimo population, both physical and psychological, which might result if the Project Chariot explosions are carried out as planned. The Association, through its executive committee, already has issued a resolution calling on the Department of the Interior to revoke the license of the Atomic Energy Commission to use the land for this purpose, on the ground that the land is subject to native claims. The Executive Subcommittee of the National Committee on Indian Health endorses the Association's opposition to Project Chariot and recommends that the Atomic Energy Commission abandon this project, or shift the proposed experiment to some uninhabited and non-productive region in which the health and welfare of nearby population groups could not be jeopardized.

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