

Sent: Tuesday, September 05, 2000

Subject: **Letter from Wisconsin re: Mi'kmaq treaty conflict**

Dear Editor,

We in Wisconsin have been following the Mi'kmaq treaty conflict very closely. It has close echoes of the conflict over Chippewa (Ojibwe) spearfishing in northern Wisconsin in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Substitute "walleye" for "lobsters" and it seems about the same.

In Wisconsin, militant anti-treaty groups carried banners reading "Spear an Indian--Save a Walleye." Wisconsin political leaders inflamed public opinion with their claim that the Ojibwe would "rape" the fish resource (even though the tribe never took more than three percent of the walleye), and tried unsuccessfully to divide different Ojibwe bands from each other. Wisconsin anti-treaty mobs committed numerous acts of violence--including rock-throwing, swamping of Ojibwe boats, death threats, and pipe bombings. Riot-clad police and National Guard helicopters were deployed to the lakes.

The major difference between the Wisconsin treaty conflict and the current conflict in the Maritimes is that here it was the racist anti-Indian groups that swamped the Native boats and threatened fishermen's lives. In New Brunswick it seems that the federal government has taken on this role, in the form of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Seeing the DFO's human rights violations on the TV news has shattered many Americans' image of Canada as a "peaceful" and "inclusive" society--an image that we value as a counterpoint to our often violent and intolerant society.

The environmentalist facade of Wisconsin anti-treaty groups fell away when mining companies such as Noranda and Rio Algom started coming into the Northwoods for metallic sulfide minerals. Even though this type of mining can release sulfuric acid into trout streams, the anti-treaty groups still chose to blame the Ojibwe for all environmental and economic problems. But many non-Indian fishing groups began to get wise, and started to

understand the history of the treaties, the Ojibwe respect for the environment, and the threat that mining would pose to fishing by Indians and non-Indians alike.

The fishing groups and the tribes began to realize that instead of arguing over the fish, they could come together to protect the fish from a common outside threat. Today, Wisconsin has a strong interethnic alliance of Native Americans, fishing groups, and environmentalists opposed to sulfide mining, and has won some victories to protect the fishery. See the Midwest Treaty Network web site for more on this story at <http://www.treatyland.com> or see the book "Walleye Warriors," by Walter Bresette and Rick Whaley.

Just as Wisconsin anti-treaty leaders focused more attention on the Ojibwe than on the mining companies, DFO Minister Herb Dhaliwal focuses more attention on lobster taken by one band of Mi'kmaq than he does on the numerous threats to the entire North Atlantic ecology--including lobster and crabs. We trust that the non-Native people of the Maritimes will also get wise to this new anti-Native campaign as a diversion from the real environmental problems facing marine life, and facing human beings of all nationalities.

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