

WISCONSIN TREATY CONFLICT NO END IN SIGHT BY ZOLTAN GROSSMAN

NATIVE
AMERICA



A member of the Wa-Swa-Gon Chippewa prepares for a night of spearfishing. The Wa-Swa-Gon are a dissident group of Chippewa who exercise their treaty rights by spearfishing off the reservation, against the wishes of their conservative tribal council.—LICHTENSTEIN

FOR TWO WEEKS every spring, normally placid Northern Wisconsin boat landings take on a tense and surreal air. Ever since a 1983 court decision upheld their treaty rights, Chippewa Indians have been legally spearfishing off of their reservations. They have been met at night by huge crowds of white protesters, who have been watched on the illuminated landings by helmeted riot police from around the state. This spring was no exception, with hundreds of protesters present from the anti-treaty groups Protect Americans' Rights and Resources (PARR) and the more militant Stop Treaty Abuse (STA), decrying what

they see as the "rape" of a natural resource vital to the local tourist economy.

Yet this year was different, with the presence of hundreds of treaty supporters organized by the Midwest Treaty Network (MTN), an alliance of about 30 grassroots Indian and non-Indian groups. Also in this election year, state officials, including Republican Governor Tommy Thompson, attempted to portray the nighttime protests as less raucous and racist than those last year.

But the 1990 spearfishing season was hardly devoid of violence. On the boat landings, rocks and full beer cans were thrown, tires of treaty supporters were slashed, and at least one vehicle sped through a group of treaty sup-

porters, forcing them to scatter along a dark Vilas County road. A Rhinelander treaty supporter's car was run into a ditch in Polk County.

On the lakes, spearfishers' boats were blockaded, rammed, and swamped by protesters' boats, pelted with rocks, and attacked with metal ball bearings shot by wrist rockets. Rifles were fired from shore. On one lake, white protesters even tried to "hook" Chippewa spearfishers with fishing poles.

Much of the harassment at the boat landings centered around the ceremonial drum that was often played. Protesters pressed in close to the drum, trying to drown it out with shouts, mock singing and drumming, and whistle-blowing. Some protesters put a

financial bounty on the drum, or flew a large American flag in the faces of the drummers. Eau Claire treaty supporter Ed Tobin observed that "attacking the sacred drum is exactly like painting a swastika on the wall of a synagogue." Oddly, the drum's steady beat nearly always ended up having a pacifying effect on the noisy crowds.

Racism Intensifies

RACIST TAUNTS this year were largely out of earshot of the media. At the request of anti-treaty leaders fearful of negative publicity or lawsuits. The assassination plans and pipe bomb attacks directed against the Chippewa last year did not recur this year. However, the reported remarks at the lakes intensified in their vicious and threatening content, including death threats. Native American people were called "timber niggers," "animals," "brown bastards," "spearchuckers" and "welfare warriors" by drunk protesters who sometimes spat on them. Some reporters, and even police, were also verbally assaulted by the rowdiest of the protesters, over 70 of whom were arrested during the spearing season, from April 10 to May 4.

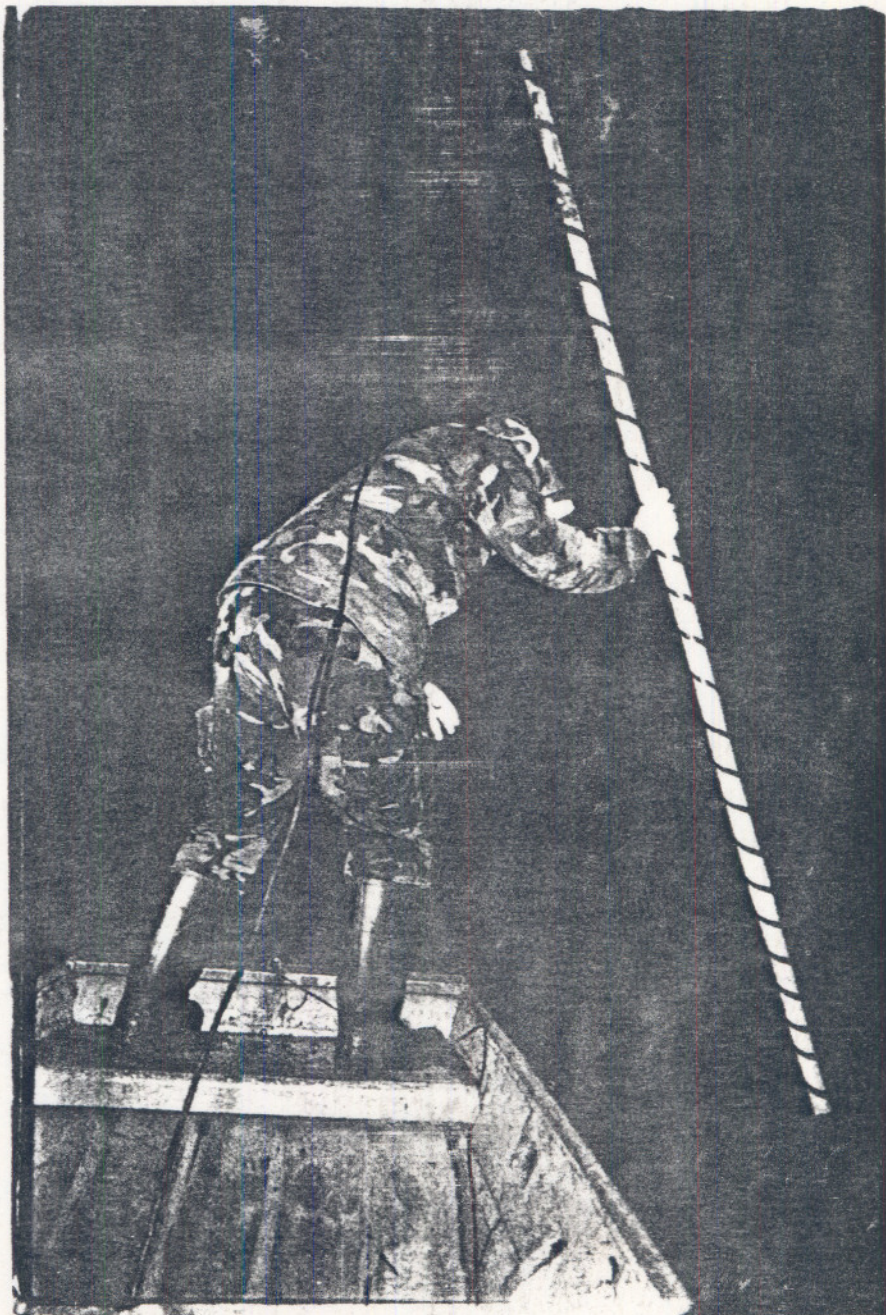
Most of the protesters' chants and songs centered on the "extermination of the walleye," even though the Chippewa have never taken more than 3 percent of the state fish catch. But the carnival atmosphere at the boat landings was punctuated with many remarks such as "Let's go out and finish this in the woods," "If we just had a bomb we could blow them all up," "Get a job," "I thought Custer killed all these Indians off, we need to get some AK-47s and finish off the job," and "Drown, drown, drown." Chippewa women were singled out with obscene remarks and called "squaws."

Many protesters wore hats with a revolver saying "Spear This." Signs read "Too Bad Custer Ran Out of Bullets," and "I Am Revolting Against Certain Indian Special Treatment" (spelling the acronym RACIST). One common chant in Vilas County was "White Man's Land." While a minority of protesters carried signs or made remarks, a majority laughed or silently acquiesced, exposing their lack of knowledge of the Chippewa. In Marathon County, a Panama-invasion veteran shouted that

he had served his country, unlike Indian "traitors," unaware that he was yelling at spearmen who were military veterans, or that President Bush gave "treaty rights" as one justification for his invasion. This year, a number of remarks were documented that openly advocated the genocide of Native American people. An Oneida County protester said that funding for an Indian alcohol rehabilitation programs should be cut off, because "they'll die off of cirrhosis of the liver. That'll get rid of the prob-

lem." Another protester told a Wisconsin Public Radio reporter, "Just wipe 'em out."

Despite these documented slurs, Vilas County Sheriff Jim Williquette told reporters that "These people are not racist...If they had stayed away, no one would have listened." Williquette has worked closely with STA leader Dean Crist, as documented in an audio tape of the two men discussing the arrangement of boat landing security. Crist is widely known as the marketer



A Chippewa spearfishing on an off-reservation lake. Spearing is done at night, with a miner's light to spot the fish.—LICHTENSTEIN



While Stop Treaty Abuse has attempted to put its racist base in the closet for the media, sometimes they just can't hide the true feelings of most of their members. —LICHENSTEIN

of "Treaty Beer," a fundraising gimmick now being canned by New Orleans Dixie Brewing. Like his followers, Crist vehemently denies that he is a racist, and says he is fighting for "equal rights for whites." In January, he was asked what he thought of the former Ku Klux Klan leader, Louisiana State Rep. David Duke, and replied that he "is saying the same stuff we have been saying...like he might have been reading it from STA literature." (Duke's Populist Party is running a PARR member for state attorney general.)

On April 27, Crist led a mass civil disobedience action to draw more federal attention to the treaty issue. Soon afterwards, fewer protesters began to show up at the lakes, and those who did went home earlier each night, leaving the Chippewa and their supporters to dominate the landings.

Much media attention was placed on the two confrontations in which Native American people were arrested, both of which now seem to have been accidents. In Polk County, an American In-

dian Movement group carrying a drum bunched too suddenly into a landing, sending a few protesters over the edge of an embankment. A Department of Natural Resources spokesman told reporters that one of two AIM arrestees was concealing a "revolver," that the next day turned into a camping knife. In Oneida County, Crist's brother was hit by a 15-year-old's spearing pole, as his boat collided with a spearing boat.

Red Cliff tribal member Walt Bresette summed up Chippewa feelings during the season when he said, "Currently, the only Chippewa who are spearfishing are those willing to risk their lives. Everyone else, through violence or threat of violence, has already lost their rights." International support grows. The news of anti-Indian racism in Wisconsin has spread far beyond the state. On April 7, the MTN sponsored the International Day of Support for the Indians of Wisconsin. Foreign groups, working in support of Native Peoples, human rights, and the environment, picketed U.S. embassies

and consulates, asking for effective security at Wisconsin lakes, the upholding of Chippewa treaty rights, and protection of Northern Wisconsin resources. Governor Thompson, who is enthusiastic about Wisconsin's prospects for foreign trade, may have to reconsider when those prospects are linked to Indian rights and safety in his state. Thompson received about 200 letters from groups in 16 countries (including pro-democracy groups in Hungary, East Germany and the Soviet Union). The Wisconsin trade office in Frankfurt also received calls.

In Vienna, Austria, the Association for Endangered Peoples held a march of 100 people from the Hofburg Palace (where the U.S. signed the International Convention on Treaties in 1969) to the U.S. Embassy. On the same day in London, a picket was held at the U.S. Embassy by a group working against the London-based Rio Tinto Zinc company, which is planning a copper mine near the Lac Courte Oreilles Reservation. (In May, Reservation Chair

Gaiashkabos attended an RTZ shareholders meeting in London to announce that the project will be stalled in court (the treaties, as it would endanger the habitat of natural resources). Events were also held in Oslo, Norway; Montreal and Toronto, Canada; Chicago and Stevens Point, Wisconsin.

Treaty supporters also heeded the words of South African Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who said in a 1988 visit to Wisconsin, "I appeal to you to assure that your native Indians in this state can see there are people who want justice done toward them. Become as committed to racial justice here as you are committed to racial justice in South Africa."

Witness For Nonviolence

THE MTN'S Witness for Nonviolence program brought hundreds of participants to the boat landings from Wisconsin, over a dozen other states, as well as Canada, West Germany and many other

countries. The Witness program is not a counter-protest to anti-treaty demonstrations, but an effort to stand with Chippewa families in moral support and active nonviolent defense, to try to prevent violence, and to report and document harassment when it does occur, with cameras and recorders.

Protesters were heard telling each other, "Don't say that, the Witnesses will hear you." At times, Witnesses linked arms to form a buffer between protesters and the Chippewa, often protecting the drum from assault.

In March, government officials launched a media offensive against the planned Witness presence. Governor Thompson joined Rep. David Obey (who last year threatened to cut federal aid to spearfishing reservations), and Senate Indian Affairs Committee Chair Daniel Inouye (ex-chair of the Iran-contra Committee) in portraying the Witnesses as "pro-treaty protesters" who should stay home.

Witnesses wore armbands to identify themselves, and were under strict in-

structions not to engage hostile anti-treaty people in arguments, hold placards, retaliate for violence, or carry any drugs, weapons or alcohol. The multiracial Witness project included environmental activists, church members, union members, and others. Some tried to build bridges with the less militant protesters, on the basis of common opposition to corporate pollution, and government neglect of economically depressed Northern Wisconsin.

Sarah Backus, of the Milwaukee Witness for Nonviolence, said that: "Thompson tries to say that last year no one got hurt and no one got shot at, neither of which is factually true. This year, he wants to remove from the landings those eyes and ears that can really document what is being done to the Chippewa spearkers."

The Witness program took part of its inspiration from similar efforts in Central America, and from patrols by the American Indian Movement to document police brutality and prevent other crimes in Minneapolis. AIM



The way the Chippewa would like to spear—with just a boat awaiting dusk. No media, no riot police, no hostile crowds shouting racial taunts.—LICHTENSTEIN

Anti-treaty leaders have replied they will protest even if one fish is speared, since their emphasis is now on the Chippewas' "special rights" more than it is on the number of fish harvested.

Just after the spearing season ended, Federal Judge Barbara Crabb issued a ruling that may have both diminished and complicated the treaty crisis. Revising her earlier ruling that 100 percent of ceded territory resources legally belong to the Chippewa, she cut the figure in half to 50 percent. All of the responsibility for managing non-Indian harvesting of the resources still belongs to the DNR. However, some Chippewa observers believe that the new Crabb decision, for all its limiting of Indian

Zoltan Grossman is active in the Madison Treaty Rights Support Group, and has supported indigenous rights in South Dakota, the Philippines, and elsewhere. He edits the Labor-Farm Party's Wisconsin Commonwealth newspaper (Box 1222, Madison WI 53701; \$8 subscription.)

NEWS FROM INDIAN COUNTRY

Twice Monthly



The Journal
News and Community Features

Pow Wow Directory
Cultural Events and Activities

75¢

Mid Sept. 1990

Vol. IV, No. 13

Northern Wisconsin

World is watching: International support growing for Wisconsin Chippewa

by Zoltan Grossman

On August 2nd, the day before Iraq invaded Kuwait, special hearings were held at the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. The committee hearing focused on the denial of human and sovereign rights, and the violent suppression of national identities. While the world watched the violations of Kuwait's sovereignty, these hearings dealt with the sovereignty of American Indians and indigenous people around the world, including testimony from a Wisconsin Chippewa about the treaty rights crisis.

Dorothy Thoms, a Lac du Flambeau Chippewa elder, addressed the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations. She testified about the history of the Chippewa treaties, racism, violence during the spearfishing seasons, harvesting issues, and mining plans in the ceded territory.

"Everybody was interested in hearing about Wisconsin, and mentioned how similar things were with their situation. The New Zealand Maoris, for instance, are also defending their treaty spearfishing rights, and many others are fighting mines," Thoms said.

Thoms was also a delegate to the 6th European Meeting of North American Indian Support Group, held near Munich, West Germany on July 24-27, drawing over 100 participants. At least ten European countries have active Indian support groups, some with hundreds or thousands of members. Thoms said to them, "How can other nations expect the United States to keep treaties with them, when it hasn't kept most of the treaties with Indian people at home?"

The International Days of Support of the Indians of Wisconsin were held in early April 1990 to call attention to the Chippewa treaty rights situation. Rallies were held in a number of cities around the world, including Vienna, London, Oslo, and Chicago. The action was sponsored by the Midwest Treaty Network (MTN), a regional network of grassroots Indian and non-Indian groups.

All the actions around the world carried the same three demands of Wisconsin and

U.S. officials, particularly Governor Thompson: uphold and defend Chippewa treaty rights, provide security for the Chippewa spearfishers, and protect Northern Wisconsin's natural resources from the threat of mining and their pollution. Administration Secretary James Klauser, admitted that the letters were drawing unwelcome international attention to Wisconsin, saying that "the whole world is watching."

Neither Thompson nor Klauser responded to the 1988 appeal of the visiting South African Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu, "I appeal to you to assure that your native Indians in this state can see there are people who want justice done toward them. Become as committed to racial justice here as you are committed to racial justice in South Africa."

In Austria on April 6, the Association for Endangered Peoples drew 100 people to a demonstration in downtown Vienna, from the Hofburg Palace to the U.S. Embassy, where members met with the acting U.S. ambassador. The group carried signs in English and German reading, "USA: Keep up the treaties with US Indians," "Protect Indian Fishers in Wisconsin," and "Stop Environmental Destruction of Indian Lands." A board member of the Indigenous Support Group, Dr. Peter Schwarzbauer, says that "the Hofburg was chosen because in that building in 1969 the International Convention of Treaties was passed. The U.S. is a signatory to this convention, which defines international treaties." The Hofburg also hosted the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which has defined international standards for human rights and the rights of national minorities. Over 400 Austrians signed a petition of support for the Chippewa.

In Britain, the People Against Rio Tinto Zinc and Subsidiaries (PARTIZANS) held a small picket at the U.S. Embassy in London.

The group works against the London-based parent company of the Kennecott mining firm, which is planning a copper mine near Ladysmith, Wisconsin. Lac Courte Oreilles Reservation Chair Gaiashkibos said that, since mine wastes would endanger ceded territory natural resources, the treaties will be used against the project. In May, he attended a London shareholders meeting of Rio Tinto Zinc, the world's largest mining company. RTZ Chairman Sir Alistair Frame bluntly told Chairman Gaiashkibos that his company will deal only with the state and U.S. governments, not tribal governments. Gaiashkibos later commented, "I'd always heard that the English people are a very cordial people, very polite people. But when you have a board of directors of a huge conglomerate, they sure lack in the

Continued on Page 31

The world learns about Chippewa people

Continued from page 3

social graces, let me tell you." RTZ is notorious for damaging the environment and the sovereignty of indigenous people around the world, especially in Namibia and Papua New Guinea, where the company's practices has been a major issue in guerrilla wars.

In Norway on April 9, a small gathering was held at the U.S. Embassy in Oslo. It was organized by Gloria Hays, a Wisconsin musician on tour in Europe. Hays and Norwegian supporters met with a U.S. embassy official.

In Canada, the Center for Nonviolence delivered a letter to the U.S. charge d'affaires at the U.S. Consulate in Montreal. The Montreal group sent five representatives to Wisconsin later in April to be witnesses at the boat landing. The group has worked against low test flights of NATO jets over traditional gathering areas of the Innu native peoples in Quebec and Labrador, and is opposing police attacks on Mohawks in Quebec.

Letters of support have been received by the Midwest Treaty Network from other countries, such as Australia, the Philippines, West Germany, East Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, Northern Ireland, Hungary, and the Soviet Union. A member of the West German Parliament, Petra K. Kelly of the Greens, wrote, "We support Chippewa treaty rights. We wish you a successful International Support Day for the Indians of Wisconsin." Soviet dissident Alik Olisevich of the Lvov Trust Group wrote, "The problems of the Chippewa Indians are close to us... We wish you the very best, and also to all the Indian peoples in USA," and a Hungarian pro-democracy group in Budapest wrote, "Tell us how we can support your fight."

In perhaps the most touching gesture, 4th and 5th grade students from a school in Parma, Italy, sent 35 colorful drawings about Chippewa spearfishing and treaty rights in Wisconsin. The drawings showed a great amount of detail about the issue, including showing orange-clad anti-treaty protesters, pro-treaty witnesses at boat landings, and mining corporations threatening Wisconsin lakes. One drawing by Giulia Gardelli translates as "If you Americans don't respect the Indians, you'll have war from us

Italians."

Over 200 international letters of concern were sent to Governor Tommy Thompson (135 letters alone from a Dutch support group). A number of them indicated that they would approach their governments to make economic cooperation with Wisconsin dependent on the safety of the Chippewa spearfishers; and many West Germans called the Wisconsin Department of Development trade office in Frankfurt. Silke Diederichsen of Berlin's Association for the Support of North American Indians added, "Please notice that people in Europe are aware of the situation of the Chippewa in Wisconsin and will monitor events. At a time when people all over the world are working for justice, an infringement of the treaty rights could have a negative influence on the tourist industry." Despite these pleas, a number of violent incidents took place on Wisconsin lakes this Spring without effective police intervention. Reporters from Sweden, Finland, and other countries were on hand to document the harassment.

The "Working Circle Indians Today" in formerly communist East Germany wrote Thompson, "Worldwide the United States of

America claims to be big Democracy protecting equal rights for all. So we wonder why the interests of sports anglers are more safe than minorities' treaty rights." The Incomindios support group in Switzerland wrote Thompson that it has addressed the issue of Chippewa treaty rights to the Swiss Foreign Minister and the United Nations in Geneva, where conferences have been held on the rights of indigenous peoples. The group received a three-page, detailed reply on Wisconsin from the U.S. embassy.

The Italian schoolkids' drawings, and many of the support letters, are shown in an exhibit travelling to different Wisconsin reservations, called "The Whole World is Watching: International Support for Wisconsin Treaty Rights." For information, call the Midwest Treaty Network at (608) 246-2256.



Treaty support grows in face of right-wing violence

By ZOLTAN GROSSMAN
Special to the Guardian

LAC DU FLAMBEAU RESERVATION, Wis.—When French explorers arrived here in the 1600s, they came across Chippewa Indians spearing fish from canoes at night. The Chippewa used torches to attract the fish, leading the voyageurs to dub the fishing ground "Lake of the Flaming Torch."

Today in Wisconsin, Chippewa spearfishing has become the focal point for a major crisis involving racism, resources and violence. When the Chippewa ceded land to the U.S. in the early 1800s, they retained off-reservation harvesting rights for fish, deer and timber. Recent court decisions have upheld the U.S.-Chippewa treaties, arousing the anger of many white sportsmen who claim that Native Americans have been granted "extra rights," and are "endangering" natural resources and the tourist economy in the North. However, spearfishing accounts for only about 3% of the state's annual fish harvest.

Two national coalitions, Protect Americans' Rights and Resources (PARR) and the more militant Stop Treaty Abuse (STA), have their headquarters in rural northeastern Wisconsin. The groups have unfortunately become models of grassroots community organizing and direct action. They have attracted crowds of up to 2000 whites to rallies in towns with a population a fraction that size. They have staged civil disobedience actions at Chippewa boat landings. Yet they have been unable to physically prevent the Chippewa's exercise of treaty rights at any lake.

For two weeks, placid northern Wisconsin boat landings took on the air of martial law, with hundreds of riot-clad police, dogs, roadblocks and National Guard helicopters. At the boat landings, crowds of up to 1000 protesters yelled racist taunts and death threats at the Chippewa (often calling them "timber niggers"), threw rocks and bottles and shot metal ball bearings with high-powered slingshots. One of the protesters' favorite chants echoed the song, "We will, we will rock you." Even a number of police were injured by protesters rushing to blockade the landings.

Out on the water, protesters' motorboats harassed Chippewa boats, sometimes swamping them. At times, guns were fired from the shoreline at the spears.

Despite the militarization in the north, the Chippewa and their supporters were often left completely unprotected at the landings. A van carrying spearsmen was run into a ditch by a pack of protesters' cars on a dark reservation road. On a road to one landing, a car accelerated into a crowd of 30 pro-treaty people, including two Native elders, who quickly scattered. Police often put the Indians, their sup-



May 6 pro-treaty rally on Butternut Lake: Months of organizing paid off.

porters and families on the same side of security fences as the protesters, almost as if to provoke confrontation.

The protests took on a more ominous tone when the Milwaukee Sentinel revealed the formation of a death squad, with a \$30,000 bounty on two Lac du Flambeau leaders—tribal judge Tom Maulson and chair Mike Allen. The daily said that the group is armed with Claymore land mines and hand grenades. The following week, a protester was arrested at a landing with 11 pipe bombs.

Wisconsin is a center of right-wing populist groups such as the John Birch Society and fascist paramilitary groups like the Posse Comitatus. Their connections to the anti-treaty movement have not been documented, but Milwaukee-based skinheads of the White Patriots League have attended at least one anti-treaty rally. The civil disobedience tactics of STA leader Dean Crist also bear a striking resemblance to those of the anti-abortion group Operation Rescue. A sign at one rally actually referred to the spearing of spawning walleye with the slogan "Save the Unborn Fish."

Agriculturally poor northeast Wisconsin has for decades been dependent on mining, logging and tourism, all of which have seen a decline in recent years. Instead of joining with the Chippewa for economic development and environmental protection, working-class whites have been turned against their natural allies. Red Cliff Chippewa activist Walt Brette says that "sooner or later, people in northern Wisconsin will realize that [destruction of the environment] is more of a threat to their lifestyle than Indians who go out and spear fish during spawning season. I think, in fact, we have more things in common with the anti-Indian people than we have with the state of Wisconsin."

The treaty support movement grew largely in response to the violence of PARR and STA, but has since extended its organizing and analysis. Northern whites originally formed a small group to educate their neighbors about treaty rights, and were joined by groups in Milwaukee, Madison and elsewhere. Indian support work had been largely dormant in Wisconsin since 1975, when the National

Guard was involved in a conflict between white vigilantes and Menominee Indians.

On Lac du Flambeau, the Wa-Swa-Gon Treaty Association gave the spearsmen and their families an organizational voice. The group invited community activists to stand with them at the landings as a "witness of nonviolence" to document violence and help defuse tensions.

Another factor has been the phenomenal support the Chippewa began receiving from other Indians in Wisconsin and around the continent. The five other Indian nationalities in the state found themselves taking racist flack—including bomb threats—for a treaty they never signed. The American Indian Movement sent out a national alert, seeing the Wisconsin situation as a harbinger for the rest of Indian country.

On May 5 Gov. Tommy Thompson lost a bid in federal court to stop the spearing, citing the potential for violence. His attempt raised a furor among civil rights supporters, who asked if he would have stopped Blacks in the old South from sitting in the front of the bus. The Wisconsin congressional delegation also raised controversy when it threatened to cut off federal grants and loans to spearing Chippewa bands.

At a pro-treaty rally here on May 6, it became clear that months of organizing had finally paid off. Over 2000 people attended the rally, and half of them later witnessed at a boat landing. A pro-treaty caravan of over 300 cars converged on Butternut Lake, the scene of violence during last year's spearing season, as a National Guard helicopter buzzed overhead. Six hundred white antitreaty protesters were shocked—and mostly pacified—by the arrival of 1000 Indians and non-Indian witnesses. A tribal drum beat steadily into the night, until the last of the spearing boats was safely in.

The Lac du Flambeau Chippewa decided to quit while they were ahead, and ended the season the following day. At a multiracial rally on the Capitol steps in Madison, Chicago Winnebago organizer James Yellowbank said, "Last night at Butternut, we gave them a non-violent asskicking." The Indians' restraint was evident in the fact that during the two-week season over 200 antitreaty protesters were arrested, yet not a single treaty supporter was arrested for striking back.

The battle now shifts to the Capitol buildings in Madison and Washington, as politicians wait for the dust to settle. They plan to offer the Chippewa bands money for leasing their treaty rights, as in a program already implemented in Minnesota. The polarization evident during the spearing season and two bands' rejection of such a "buy-out" make such a deal much less likely. As for now, the Chippewa are relieved at the temporary lull in the crisis.

For more information contact: The Madison Treaty Rights Support Group, 731 State Street, Madison, Wis., 53703. ■