

the meantime, both aboriginal and non-aboriginal interests require some innovative policy and action in the area of claims settlement as well as some assistance in terms of community and inter-ethnic relations.

## **26. The Fur Issue**

Another issue affecting the traditional economy of aboriginal people is the fur issue: the threat to aboriginal trappers posed by the animal rights campaign. A well-organized international lobby effort is aimed at halting the sale of furs obtained through the use of the leg-hold trap. While the leg-hold trap has supposedly been the target of this campaign, it seems clear that it is the killing of fur-bearing animals for any reason or under any conditions that is the real target. The socio-economic impact of the collapse of the seal industry in 1983 due to increasing pressure in Europe to ban the import of seal furs is still being felt throughout Arctic communities. A successful assault on the remainder of the fur industry will have a devastating impact on the aboriginal economy and on aboriginal cultures.

From the aboriginal viewpoint, the campaign against fur trapping represents the latest imposition of foreign values to the point of destroying what remains of the aboriginal economy and a way of life with it. The relationship of aboriginal trappers to the animals they kill is regulated by a body of spiritual norms that are based on respect and gratitude to Mother Earth and for "gifts" from the animal spirits. A report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development in December 1986 (*The Fur Issue: Cultural Continuity, Economic Opportunity*) found that "such customs are the important link between trapping and the maintenance of culture."

Some of the arguments raised by anti-trapping activists reveal a fundamental conflict in values that raises some serious human rights questions. In addition to dismissing the spiritual aspect of hunting and trapping activities, the anti-trapping movement places a greater priority on animal rights than human rights. And in the context of the anti-sealing campaign, the welfare of baby animals has taken precedence over that of baby Inuit.

While not all Canadians sympathize with the anti-trapping movement, it is nevertheless a growing one. The Fur Issue Report