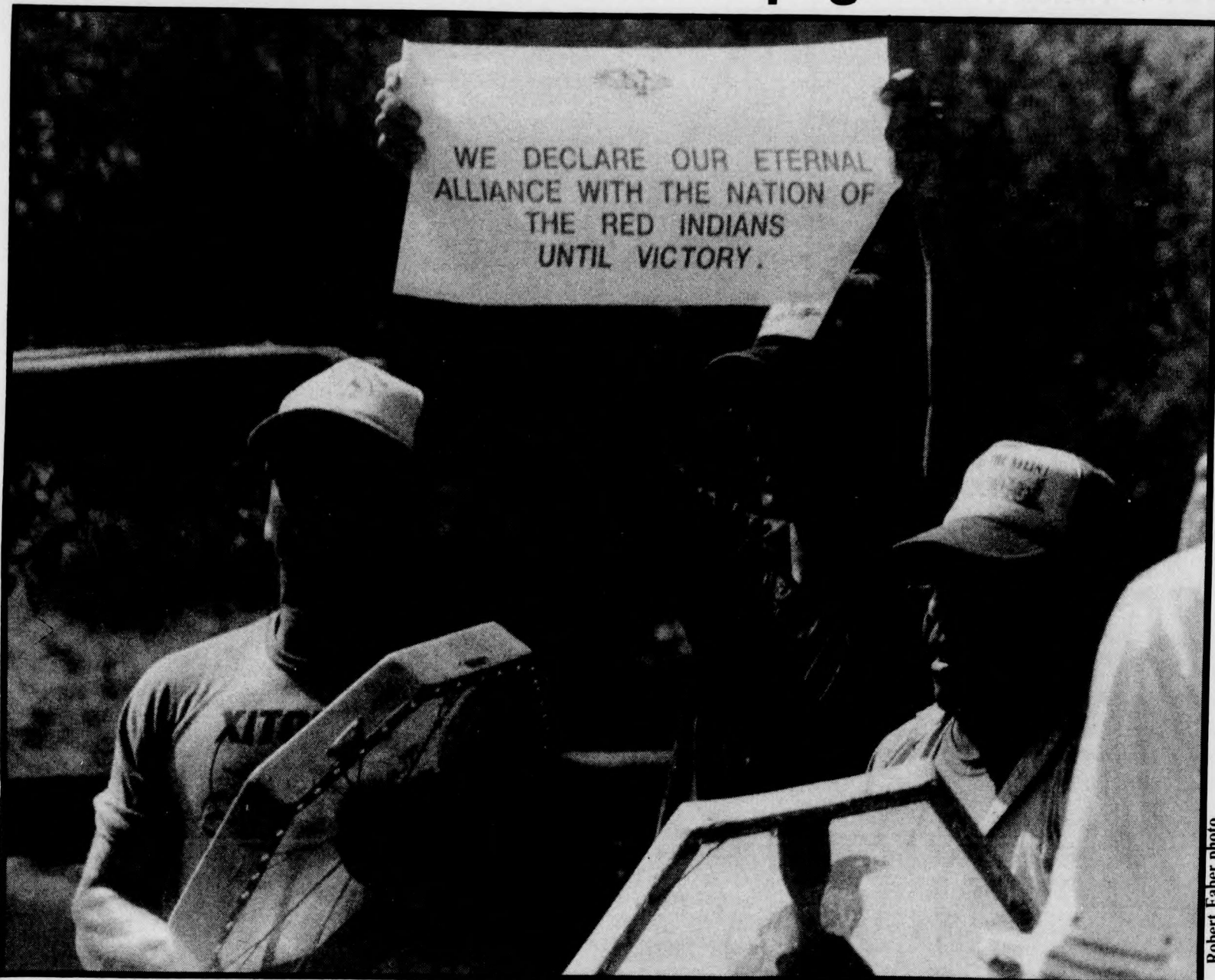


INSIGHT

Lil' Wat Nation indicative of plight of natives



Robert Faber photo

Roadblocks in B.C.: Many Natives across Canada have been actively supporting the Mohawks in Oka, Quebec. Native awareness and solidarity has never been higher in this country.

York student Robert Faber spent four months this year at the Lil' Wat Indian Reserve in western B.C. He was the only non-Native allowed to attend meetings at the reserve. The following is his account of the Native experience.

For the last month, the issue of the Mohawk Indians in Oka, Quebec has escalated to a near civil war. Most of us, and I am no exception, have very little knowledge of land claims. However, after having spent time on the Lil'Wat Reserve (or, as Indians prefer, Lil'Wat Nation), I was able to develop a better understanding of the natives' frustration.

Living with Wayne Daniel Andrews, the nephew of Mt. Currie's Chief Fraser Andrews, and the 1984 World Indian Saddle Bronc Champion, has given me a new outlook towards native Indian life. I had the opportunity to experience part of a culture which many Canadians never will.

During my four month stay, I grew to understand the feelings of utter helplessness felt by the Indians. The Lil'Wat Nation has had their land raped and stolen. Their mountains are used for clear cut logging. Their land has been turned into ski resorts without permission or notice.

Whistler Mountain, for example, which is now a luxury resort, was once the place where Wayne set his trap lines for martins. Also, a lot of the surrounding water supply is believed to have been

contaminated by the PCB plant that was built without permission on the Nation's land. Many fish in these waters, such as the spring salmon, come here to spawn.

Each morning for the first month of my stay, I awoke to the sounds of clear cut logging. The damage was clearly visible as the logging company made no attempt to hide its taking of trees from the Indian Nation.

Our government is partly responsible for this atrocity, as the Indians have never surrendered this land. The Forestry Ministry has sold land to these companies which initially belonged to the Lil'Wat Nation. The companies in return have sold the land back to the government after being logged out, so that they would not be the guilty-looking parties.

Billions of dollars worth of trees are being stolen from the Indians, not to mention the loss of trap lines used for generations as hunting grounds which most Indians depend on for food year round. Only recently has mining on this Nation stopped, but the damages to their burial grounds are irreversible.

The Natives can only hold on to small traces of their history. Small ochre pictographs of deer remain to indicate where Indians

lived before the white man came to settle.

It was clear cut logging that instigated the first road block. Logging companies had been given five year contracts to log out the Lil'Wat area. Meetings to inform the public were set up by the Ministry, which invited people from the nearby Pemberton Township, located just outside the Nation.

However, the Indians were not asked to attend this question and answer period. Due to the first road block, it was moved; organizers feared Indians would protest. I was unable to find the relocated meeting.

To better understand, let me explain the process of clear cut logging. First, chemicals are sprayed on a chosen area to kill the underbrush and make it easier to log. These chemicals are extremely poisonous, and the workers must wear heavy gloves to protect their skin. After their work is done, the area is too polluted and dangerous to support animals.

This ruthless method has a devastating impact on the Indians, as hunting is one of the means of their survival. Left behind is bare land that erodes and eventually leaves only rocks. Replanting rarely works, and the future success of newly planted trees is uncertain.

Confrontations with directors or head loggers has been aggravating for both parties. One of the logging company owners, Doug, believes that the land is his, fair and square. He claims he has a five year plan to log the mountains.

Once the land is stripped of its important elements, he would be happy to return it to the Indians.

He claims, "I own it," which, of course, is untrue. Not even the Indians claim to own the land; only Mother Nature can own it.

Others at the road block were just as ignorant. One dump truck driver attempted to drive his truck through a chain of Indians who stood in linked arms. Travellers were only asked to stop and receive a notice that informed them of the Native frustration with the treatment of clear cut logging and the abuse of their land claims. Some, like the truck driver, lacked interest in their peaceful demonstration. The Natives were bearing no weapons or other forms of protection.

This sort of behaviour left the Indians no alternative but retaliation. Their hearts were filled with

“... until the wrongs against (Natives) can be rectified, Canada cannot claim to be true, strong or free.”

frustration and anger. This was the beginning of the roadblock crisis.

The incidents in Oka escalated into a second roadblock, which became a necessity. This barricade has lasted over a month, and is still in existence. Being the first and only non-Indian allowed to cross the roadblock with a vehicle, I felt accepted by the Natives. I was also allowed to sit in on their meetings.

On the second roadblock, the Natives still wanted to maintain

continued on page 8

Billy Barroo's

rhythm & brews

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
6 6 0 0 0 5 6

FREE

HANGOVER

BUFFET

EVERY

SUNDAY

NOON

TIL

2:00 PM

**CORNER OF
DUFFERIN
AND STEELES**