

THE POLITICS OF FUR

We look for issues, we look for programs to address those issues, and the renewable resource industries supply those issues... Therefore, to think or to hope that there may not be a protest associated with it (fur), flies against the basic services these (animal rights) organizations are offering...

We would work, as an organization, always to the most extreme. And at some point the general public would decide how far that would go. We would not start off with a compromise. (Stephen Best, Vice-Chairman, International Wildlife Coalition, Issue 24:2, 13, 32; 27-5-86)

The Animal Rights Movement

Expanding industrialization, with its adverse effects on the natural environment, has created concerns over the quality of our air, water and the erosion of wildlife habitats. Testimony before the Committee suggested that the rise of the animal rights activist movement is linked to increasing environmental awareness by our urban society. "The animal rights movement is both a product and a promoter of this trend in environmental awareness."⁽¹⁾ There is a genuine concern in western society about environmental degradation and over-exploitation of our natural resources which makes us vulnerable to any imagery which exploits it.

...the anti-fur campaigns, like the anti-sealing campaigns, can have the impact they do because people in the society are generally concerned about the environment. Here is something you can do to protect the environment. You can stop sealing; you can stop trapping. That is why the public has a tendency to respond to these movements. I do not think these campaigns contribute to protection of the environment, but the point is that the base issue that the public is responding to is a valid one.⁽²⁾

Characteristically, conservation concerns have figured prominently in the history of the movement. Public attention on these conservation issues brought about improved national and international regulation of endangered species. The drafting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) in March 1973 was an important step to protect endangered species by monitoring and regulating traffic in wildlife at the international level.

Humane concerns about methods of taking animals, we have seen, led to trap research programs, with the initiative often taken by concerned animal welfare groups. Their solicitude centred on the leghold trap, which had been the principal holding device since the 1800s. The perceived cruelty associated with the use of the leghold trap has been the subject of limited but persistent Canadian campaigns since the 1940s.

Despite the progress made in developing more humane traps and in regulating wildlife harvesting, protest has grown. The emphasis, however, has shifted. What started in North America as an anti-leghold trap crusade is developing into a campaign to destroy the consumer market for furs and a general attack on any human use of furbearers.

Although the activist movement is composed of many single and multi-issue groups, it does divide into two basic schools: animal welfare and animal rights.

Traditional animal welfare organizations are concerned about humane treatment of animals and wish to ensure that animals are not abused. Such groups are willing to work with government to