

MAR 9 1988

#1 Dakota Court,
YELLOWKNIFE,
Northwest Territories,
CANADA
XIA 2A4

THE RIGHT REVEREND
JOHN R. SPERRY, D.D.
BISHOP OF THE ARCTIC



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TORONTO, CANADA
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The House of Commons,
LONDON,
England

9th. March 1988

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Dear Member,

It may seem presumptuous for a bishop of the Anglican Church of Canada to intrude upon the important business of the British House of Commons; but please bear with me. My plea for your sympathy and understanding stems from my deep concern as the Bishop of The Arctic, one with a constituency covering the top one third of Canada, mostly Arctic and sub-Arctic terrain. Our people are Indians, Metis and Eskimo (Inuit) who for centuries have lived in harmony with the land, the waters and their animal inhabitants.

Both in pre-Christian and modern historic eras the aboriginal native peoples of North America have had a special relationship with the animals they hunted and trapped and continue to do so to this present day. Especially in my area, beyond the limits of agricultural possibility, the harvesting of animal life is an essential part of life itself; of independence, traditional culture and everything in human experience which guarantees personal worth and dignity.

Should the threatened move to label certain fur products from trapped animals becomes law, the implications will undoubtedly level a disastrous blow to an essential way of life pursued by very many native Canadians. Those of us who live in these regions (I myself will soon have completed four decades in the Northwest Territories) reject much of the verbiage which characterizes trapping as barbarous and diabolical. As one who in earlier days on the Arctic coast undertook long dogteam missionary journeys, over the years I have seen hundreds of trapped foxes and can affirm that a trapped fox is mercifully anesthetized within moments, due to the intense cold, and its demise can be as expeditious as any slaughtering methods used on the millions of animals (equally innocent) that feed the enormous populations in southern climes of which you will be so well familiar.

House of Commons/

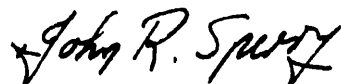
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It is my contention that in dealing with these issues we all are compelled to accept the fact that human rights have also to be brought into focus. Let us face it; as deplorable as the thought may be, certain ethnic minorities within the Commonwealth, once acclaimed for their survival achievement in a climate of incredible hardship, could all too easily become culturally extinct within a very short span of time. The brutal facts are that one can espouse seemingly noble causes in one part of our world without any appreciation for the unalterable and irreversible harm caused for human victims in some distant and remote habitat where, for the average person, conditions are unimaginable.

In our part of the world, for instance, without agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, factories and all the avenues of employment traditionally evident in your island home, our native people are themselves trapped, so to speak; caught in an era of cultural erosion, beset by social upheavals of every description and experiencing a perplexity unknown in their entire history. To rob them of what little is left of their traditional way of life is, to my mind, an act of unwarranted cruelty unworthy of a nation, the leader of the Commonwealth, whose understanding of and sympathy with racial minorities has hitherto been legendary in every corner of the globe.

Your support for Early Motion 651 would do much to stave off any precipitate negative action on this issue and earn the gratitude of thousands of our beleaguered native Canadians and, indeed, of those of us who have lived and served among them for very much of our lives.

Yours sincerely,



[John R. Sperry]

Bishop of The Arctic

APPENDIX

The following Early Day Motions have been tabled in the U.K. House of Commons:

"That this House, noting the 1951 Scott Henderson Committee Report's description of the steel-jaw leg-hold trap as "a diabolical instrument which causes an incalculable amount of suffering", and the ban on its use by 66 countries, calls upon Her Majesty's Government to ban immediately the import of all furs from countries still legally permitting the use of this trap and to encourage other European Economic Community and Council of Europe countries to do the same."

Motion
651

"That this house noting that the Indian and Metis people of North America and the Inuit of the Circumpolar are largely dependant on income derived from hunting, fishing and trapping to support their culture, economy, society and well-being; acknowledges the historic responsibility of the British people to uphold the spirit of the treaties negotiated between aboriginal peoples in Canada and the United States with her Majesty's Government to maintain this traditional way of life; supports World Conservation Strategy of sustainable development of indigenous peoples through harvesting renewable resources by traditional pursuits and suggests that no action be taken which could damage in any way and to any degree the economic and cultural interests of these native peoples."

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The Minister of Trade and Industry has proposed that:

"...all goods made from or including the fur of bobcat, coyote, lynx, wolf and certain species of fox, when they are supplied or offered for supply at point of retail sale in this country to be marked with a statement that the goods include fur from animals commonly caught by means of a leg hold trap. Such goods will require to have that statement stitched in them in a prescribed form..."