

Bill calls for halt to harvest

The war between the Pribilof Island Aleuts and the environmentalists and their supporters has heated up once again.

A bill introduced into the U.S. Congress by Rep. Lester Wolff, D-N.Y., has produced further outrage on the part of the Alaskan Aleuts. The bill, introduced Aug. 1 calls on President Carter to drop out of the existing fur seal treaty which allows the annual harvest of fur seals on St. Paul.

Both Larry Merculieff, Chairman of the Board of the Aleut Corporation and Agafon Krukoff, the corporation's president, have sent letters pointing out that many of the facts Wolff is using to garner support for his bill are wrong.

In addition, Krukoff has strongly urged that before

any action is taken on the bill Congressional hearings should be scheduled on the islands themselves.

"I'm really not worried about this bill, but I'm fed up with such bills", Krukoff said last Friday.

The annual fur seal harvest has been under unusually vigorous attack this year. The treaty under which it is conducted ends in October of 1980, but steps have to be taken by this October if it is to be extended or renegotiated. Otherwise it will lapse.

Under the treaty, which originated from the 1911 Fur Seal Convention between the U.S., Russian, Japan, and Canada, the seal herds have grown to an estimated 1.4 million from their low point of about 200,000 when the convention was first signed.

Called by many know-

ledgeable observers as one of the best conservation management systems ever devised, the annual hunt is opposed by environmentalists who claim it is too expensive and inhumane.

The Aleuts have consistently pointed out that the figures used by the environmentalists are incorrect and cite several studies by national and international humane organizations who have concluded that the present method of taking the seals is the most humane method available.

A prime objection on the part of Wolff and other environmentalists to the taking of the seals is that the prime reasons the seals are harvested is for their skins. In a letter to Alaska Congressman Don Young, Krukoff pointed out that thousands of animals are taken each year in New York, Wolff's "own backyard", solely for the purpose of harvesting their pelts.

Congressman Young, and Senator Ted Stevens have said they will do everything possible to oppose the bill. Wolff said he hoped to begin hearings on the bill in early September.