

Seals Vs. People In The Pribilofs

Are The Aleuts An Endangered Species?

By LARRY MERCULIEFF

As a result of intense political pressure from animal protection groups, a moratorium on the killing of fur-seal has been instituted on St. George Island in the Pribilofs, home of 200 Aleuts. The purpose of the moratorium is to study fur-seal population dynamics, to determine if the seal herds are diminishing in numbers.

Far too often, consideration of the welfare and well-being of Pribilof Aleuts has been second to the fur-seal. Historically Aleuts have endured great injustices, particularly Pribilof Aleuts. The time has come for this to stop. Consider what the St. George Aleuts have to put up with this time because of the moratorium:

1. The federal government has already provided the only source of employment for the Pribilof people - now that only source of income is being jeopardized.

2. The St. George students, having already spent nine months away from home to attend the loveless boarding schools, can not go home for the summer if they want gainful summer employment. The federal government states that if St. George students want jobs they must work on St. Paul.

3. The greatest injustice of all is the fact that the Aleuts of St. George are no longer

allowed to take seals for food. Pribilof Aleuts have depended on seals for food for over 200 years. Why should we abide by impersonal scientific considerations?

The agency administering the fur-seal program was "good" enough to have seal carcasses from St. Paul shipped to St. George. I wonder what the Food and Drug Administration would do when they get eyewitness reports on how this food was handled. I was on the ship (which carried the meat to St. George) when the seal meat was loaded on board. The meat was not even covered and therefore exposed to air, sun, and houseflies. The rotting meat was then loaded onto the ship by

the same kind of filthy nets used on shore, and placed on deck of the ship. Dog food is given more consideration than was given to the handling of this meat!

The seals were killed between 8 and 10 A.M. that day, and it reached St. George about 6 P.M. that day: so the food was exposed for over eight hours before it reached its destination - rotten, dried up, dirty, and fly ridden.

Given the fact that there are only 2,000 Aleuts in existence in the world, is it too much to ask that we be placed on the national endangered species list so that we can be given the same consideration as our nation's animals?