

## **PRESENTATION OF THE DOCUMENTARY**

### ***Incident at Restigouche, 1984***

Released in 1984, the 46 minutes documentary, *Incident at Restigouche* looks back at a pivotal episode in Indigenous claims to territory and resource management.

On June 11, 1981, more than 550 members of the Quebec provincial police, clad in riot gear, descended upon the Restigouche reserve, forcefully intervening against some 150 fishermen in the small Mi'kmaq community located in the Gaspé Peninsula.

The ostensible motive for the raid was to inspect the community's modest salmon fishery, but the scale and brutality of the police action — which Obomsawin documented through interviews with community members — made it clear that this was an effort to dramatically assert provincial authority at the expense of Indigenous sovereignty.

The restrictions that the Quebec government attempted to impose on this fishery, a source of food and income for the Micmacs, immediately fueled anger and consternation.

Throughout the documentary, photographs and film footage are interspersed with interviews with key figures from the Restigouche incident.

One of the most memorable moments in the film is the heated interview that Alanis Obomsawin conducted in her own home with Fisheries Minister Lucien Lessard.

Courtroom sketches illustrate the judicial process that followed the roundups. Internal documents from the National Film Board of Canada featured in the exhibition attest to the difficulties Obomsawin faced at the time in getting her documentary approved.

She had to complete a lengthy bureaucratic approval process, typical when responding to an ongoing crisis.

The programming committee also gave her specific instructions to only speak to “Indians” and not “white people”, in their words.

This hard-hitting account of the police intervention made Alanis Obomsawin internationally known.

Decades later, Mi'kmaq filmmaker Jeff Barnaby, a pioneer of contemporary Indigenous cinema with his films *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* and *Blood Quantum*, would cite *Incident at Restigouche* as an inspiration.

“As for me, that documentary crystallized the idea that films can be a form of social protest... It all started there, with that film.”