

MP Wally Firth —**MP says no gasline without Native claims settlement**

From Northern News Report

EDITOR'S NOTE: Territorial MP Wally Firth of Inuvik was one of the speakers at the Northern Development Conference in Edmonton. These are excerpts from his remarks.

By Wally Firth, MP

I feel very strongly—and I have never found anything to contradict this belief—that the people of the North should be looking to develop renewable natural resources. We should not wait for the oil companies to take away our non-renewable resources. If we do, the people of the North will eventually be

left with nothing and our land, in many areas, will be useless.

Who is going to benefit from the Mackenzie River pipeline that so many special interest groups are committed to having built? The Canadian People?

The main purpose of the pipeline is to move Alaskan gas to the United States. But the shipment of Alaskan gas from Prudhoe Bay is dependent on the rate at which oil can be extracted. This means that it will be mainly Canadian gas that will be shipped through the pipeline in the early stages. We would be selling Canadian gas to American consumers, yet we are not certain of our country's energy

needs for the near future.

Are Figures Good?

From the figures that I have been able to get, Canada only has, at the very most, some seven trillion cubic feet of gas in the Arctic. The Americans have 344 trillion feet. My estimates rely on the figures presented by the oil companies themselves. How much the Canadian public can believe these figures any more is a question I would rather not go into now.

However, even using the estimates of the oil companies, I cannot help but conclude that by the time the Prudhoe Bay gas starts to move, we Canadians will—quite literally—have run out of gas. Canadians will then either have to do without gas or buy it from the Americans—that is, if the United States wants to sell it to us.

With the world market the way it now is, the Americans might not even have any left for us later.

As we have all seen in the last year, the oil policies established by the Canadian government in the early 1970s—policies that promised a virtual land of milk and honey for the North—have been completely torn to shreds.

What Policy?

The government oil policies were based on the estimates of the oil companies—estimates which the government took at face value (or 'hook, line and sinker' as we say up North.) As far as many of us in the North can see, the only government policy at present is to wait for the oil companies to come up with a new set of estimates.

The question remains, if neither the Canadian government nor the oil companies are sure of their estimates for

justifying the building of the Mackenzie River pipeline, what benefits can the Canadian public look forward to? The only fact that Canadians can be sure of today is that the oil is still in the ground and that is still a Canadian asset.

The New Democratic Party has taken the position that Canada should reduce its present exports of gas to the United States. We should also concentrate on the exploration and development of our natural gas reserves in the settled regions of Canada. In this way we would be sure to meet Canadian needs for many years, and this would give us time to assess other options.

Coal Resources

One option is investigating the redevelopment of the coal industry as many European countries have been doing since 1973. Canada has huge deposits of coal; they are located in settled areas. In many of these areas, such as the Maritimes, they would create badly needed jobs. It would also make Canada self-sufficient in energy at less cost to the Canadian taxpayer.

We should take it as a basic truism that the purpose of an energy policy for Canada is to provide energy to the Canadian public in all parts of Canada at the lowest price possible. Canadian energy policy does not mean that the Canadian public must only cater to the interests of the oil industry. If the oil industry can no longer meet Canada's energy needs efficiently and at reasonable costs, then it is the obligation of Canadian public officials—federal and provincial—to look elsewhere.

New Options and policies can be far less expensive in supplying Canadian energy needs. Yet the federal government is not providing research money to investigate new energy alternatives nor is there any indication that the government ever intends to do so.

Easy Answer

It has become fashionable in the public media that when there is a public discussion of energy in Northern Canada, it is always understood that the oil reserves must be taken from Northern Canada for the use of people in Southern areas.

I just cannot accept this line of reasoning. For one thing, as we all know, oil is a non-renewable resource and there are just not unlimited resources of oil in

the Canadian Arctic.

Secondly, as a Northerner, I resent the audacity of that assumption. An energy policy for the North must, first and foremost, take into consideration the needs of the people living in the North. Anything less is simple ignorance and leads to exploitation, frustration and bitterness.

What effect will the pipeline have on the people of the North?

The Native people of the Northwest Territories are deeply concerned about the effects this pipeline will have on their environment. I have personally campaigned in two elections on this issue. I can tell you how much the Native peoples feel for the land which is the source of their livelihood.

The Native people are very concerned that their way of life will be changed permanently. Nothing the government has said or done so far has even begun to calm their fears...

What (pipeline) benefit can the native peoples expect? Job opportunities?

One Metis at IOL

First of all, Imperial oil established drilling operations at Norman Wells over 40 years ago. Out of a present community of about 200, only one Metis is employed permanently.

There is a pipeline operating at Pointed Mountain, Fort Liard. Not one Native person is employed there. To be fair, the company did employ Native people to help clear the brush before commencing operations.

Earlier I urged that the Canadian government explore alternative energy policies for Canadians in settled regions. Let me now list a few suggestions for alternative energy resources for the people living in the North...

One suggestion for meeting the energy needs of the North is to look at the lumbering possibilities. This is not a new idea by any means.

In Old Crow in the Yukon, a school is heated by cordwood. This has several advantages.

The school employs four firemen to keep it heated. It also provides employment contracts for local people to acquire firewood...The local people have employment by providing their own energy and not waiting for others to supply it for them; secondly, they are making use of a natural and renewable resource.

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