

# Banks Island Folks

The Canadian government has authorized oil exploration on Banks Island, an island north of the Arctic Circle in the Northwest Territories, but the natives there have vowed they will take "whatever action is necessary" to prevent exploration.

As reported in "News of the North," a Yellowknife, N.W.T. newspaper, the Eskimos on the island feel that exploration will harm the hunting and trapping economy of the island which provides its inhabitants with a profitable livelihood.

The government, the people said in a telegram to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, issued the leases for exploration "without prior consultation whatsoever with the Eskimo people. [These actions are an example of your government's continuing complete disregard for the rights of the Eskimo people and are contrary to the standards of common decency.

The Eskimo people of Banks Island are self-sufficient trappers

and hunters, the telegram continued, annually achieving the world's richest white fox harvest and have so used these lands since time immemorial.

According to the newspaper, some of the people earn about \$14,000 a year off the fox harvest and nobody depends on the government for handouts.

They fear that exploration crews, blasting and the noise of machinery will hurt trapping, possibly disrupting the fox pattern and destroying the breeding grounds.

And the paper said, "Suggestions that high paying jobs would be available with the oil companies tend to fall on deaf ears. The people of Banks Island say they much prefer to work for themselves, rather than be bossed around by White men. They point out also, that there is no assurance of such work on a permanent basis."

The people requested not only that the government prevent any further exploration until consultation with the Eskimo people, but that it also consult them about any further undertakings planned for the future.

In closing the telegram, the Eskimos also asked Trudeau that "your government recognize our rights as aboriginals in the lands of the North and give us fair compensation where there is expropriation of our rights in the lands."