

MP Firth Protests Absence of Natives in Task Force

Wally Firth, New Democratic Party MP for the Northwest Territories, has protested the absence of any northerners from a task force set up under the aegis of the Canadian Council of Resources and Environment Ministers to study development.

The task force is one of a number established to prepare for the Man and Resources Conference later this year in Toronto.

Following is the text of a letter Mr. Firth has sent to Peter Mayers, executive director of the conference, calling for the appointment of some northerners to the task force:

"It is my belief, and the belief of my countrymen, that the Northern interests cannot in any way be represented in a task force such as this one without the appointment, at the very least, of one Northerner.

"On this task force there are no natives, no northern entrepreneurs, no local government representatives, no residents of any isolated northern community from either the Yukon or the Northwest Territories.

"There are general questions that are peculiar to the north, but the range and diversity of people and circumstances within the north require considerably

more than one representative on any task force concerning development.

"No southerner can claim knowledge or awareness of the separate cultures and consciousness of the north without having lived and worked in the country for most of his life.

"The special problems of operating local small businesses and service industries in the north, where the federal government is both regulator and principal client, cannot be appreciated by anyone who has not had to work under these conditions.

"Problems of supply, transportation and communication are only abstract questions to outside interests. But from a northern point of view they are an entirely different matter.

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Firth . . .

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"Only a true northerner can articulate the different meanings the word development has for him. In the past, development has too often only presented a painful choice to northern residents: that of the opportunity to make a fast dollar or to oppose the destruction of their way of life.

"The whole problem comes down to one of attitudes. Big Government and big business, operate on the assumption that Northerners must adjust to their way of doing things.

"Until recently, Northerners had been bullied and conned into believing that people on the outside knew what was best for them. Now, Northerners are beginning to demand that outside interests adapt to the North and its people rather than the other way around.

"If Northerners are simply to continue to be given only token consultation in matters profoundly affecting their lives, the day is not too far off, when they are going to insist on full control of resources and development in their homeland.

"Finally, I would urge you to reconsider the make-up of the Task Force. If you are interested, I could suggest dozens of suitable candidates."