

Benefits for all

It's bewildering to think that more than \$32 million has been pumped into a mine within the Deh Cho region, but a mere pittance has accrued to local businesses and residents.

CanTung mine resumed production in January and had been making preparations for months prior to that. The most commonly used defence for the lack of Deh Cho benefits is two-fold:

1) The road through the Yukon is the mine's lifeline.

2) Little interest has been expressed to date by First Nations and businesses in the Deh Cho.

For the record, there hasn't been anyone vigorously refuting those arguments, not since the departure of Shane Parrish, former CEO of the Acho Dene Koe Group of Companies, anyway.

Another factor that makes CanTung a tough nut to crack is that it has been around since the '60s. Therefore it can cling to exceptions for existing third-party interests and can fall back

on some of those infamous grandfather-type clauses — although North American Tungsten currently has a heck of a battle on its hands against the Mackenzie Valley Land and Water Board, which won't renew its water licence under dated terms. It looks like that matter will be decided in court.

The Deh Cho First Nations' struggles to guarantee royalties and impact benefits agreements through the federal government — equitable measures, all — wouldn't apply at CanTung even if the details were worked out and ratified yesterday or last year.

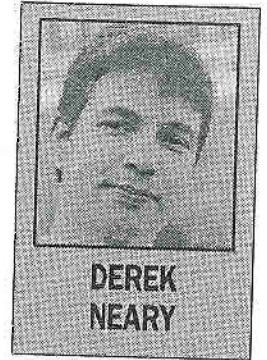
Therefore, having a delegation meet face-to-face with the mine's top executive last week, although overdue, was a step in the right direction. The demands placed on Udo von Doehren, president of North American Tungsten, last Friday were neither great nor unreasonable.

The challenge was for CanTung to provide more jobs for local people and to pay to get them to and from the mine. Although von Doehren balked at picking up the full tab for the employees' return flights from Fort Simpson, he was willing to entertain a lesser cost if government or any other group would subsidize it.

To hold up its end of the bargain, the Deh Cho will now have to produce some committed employees. A three-week in, three-week out camp environment in such a remote, but scenic, location isn't appealing to every unemployed individual. Whatever the reason, there's obviously a hurdle to overcome when 10 of 11 CanTung employees from Fort Liard and Nahanni Butte walked away from their jobs.

In a region of 3,000 people, not all of them of working age, not all of them seeking employment, there are only so many workers to spread around as development projects become a reality. Opening the door to other NWT residents and Southerners who are willing to make their home in the Deh Cho is inevitable.

By starting now to figure out other ways the Deh Cho can benefit when the larger and richer MacTung deposits are tapped into, the better off we'll all be.



**DEREK
NEARY**