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September 6, 1981

NEW BRUNSWICK: TODAY AND TOMORROW

By MAUREEN NEVIN DUFFY

NEW BRUNSWICK'S long-awaited "tomorrow" has taken seven years to arrive. Now that visible signs of rebirth - a Hyatt Regency Hotel, the new world headquarters of Johnson & Johnson and Middlesex General Hospital's modern expansion - are finally rising from the rubble, New Brunswick minorities are wondering if their "tomorrow" was ever in the plan.

Their doubts began when old neighborhoods started giving way to commercial buildings and parking lots. Failure to replace the only supermarket in the area occupied by low- and moderate-income residents - the store was closed years ago - hasn't inspired confidence, either. (Carless residents have to lay out at least \$7 in cab fare if they want to shop at the Foodtown store on the other side of New Brunswick).

However, tempers have been simmering over yet another issue, that of the estimated 200 hotel jobs opening up with the Hyatt. The hotel's owner, the New Brunswick Development Corporation, built the Hyatt with the aid of a \$6 million Federal Housing and Urban Development grant, which requires that a percentage of low- and moderate-income residents be hired by the hotel. But the final agreement between the corporation and Hyatt fails to set out this commitment.

As Myriam Rivera, a lawyer and leader of the local Housing and Economic Development Task Force, put it: "We want the people right here in town to have first crack at these jobs. Also, in order to train people, we need written job descriptions from Hyatt. As it is, practically all managerial positions will be filled by Hyatt's own people."

Ted Hardgrove, president of New Brunswick Tomorrow, says that training programs have been planned and will be implemented in time for the hiring. However, he contends that limiting prospective employees to New Brunswick residents would be discriminatory and, therefore, illegal.

In reply, Miss Rivera has cited a similar situation in Boston, where the City Council made a special ruling giving Bostonians first choice on jobs at all city-endorsed projects.

New Brunswick insists that the task force will see fair hiring practices conducted when the time comes. The task force wants the practices spelled out and made legally binding now; in lieu of this, it has begun its own job application program.

During weekly meetings, residents are counseled on projected job opportunities, how to apply for them, what skills are required and how to obtain skills through training. All of these efforts are being undertaken outside the auspices of the city.

Mr. Hardgrove, who previously earned respect as a community supporter in Newark, contends that New Brunswick has shown its concern for minority welfare by hiring him in the first place. Still, street talk says that "the man" pays Mr. Hardgrove's salary and that's who he's going to work for.

It is ironic that, in this fight for rights, Mr. Hardgrove has had to petition for his right to a fair trial by the people. Public suspicion is also fed by the fact that New Brunswick Tomorrow's consultant, the American City Corporation, was also responsible for the "rebirth" of Hartford, Conn.

Referred to by Hartford minorities as the Hartford Horror, the project was guilty of, among other things, failing to include the Puerto Rican community - 25 percent of the population - in its plans.

Considering the commitment of the well-seasoned activists - some of them lawyers - who make up the New Brunswick Task Force, the likelihood of the city's falling into any Hartfordsque patterns seems pretty slim.

However, the task force is still seeking support from the community at large, without whose involvement, they say, the effort to protect minority interests may fail. ----- Maureen Nevin Duffy lives in Edison.

