



The Brief

Vol. 1 No. 12

A project of the NB Media Co-op

July/August 2010

nbmediacoop.org

How New Brunswickers fought back Four years of taking on the Liberal Party of New Brunswick



Over 2,000 New Brunswickers pack the lawn of the New Brunswick Legislature on March 20, 2010 to protest the sale of their public power utility to Hydro Quebec. Photo: Julie Michaud.

By MARIE-CHRISTINE ALLARD

"The problem is that New Brunswickers just don't care." How many times have you heard this response – or uttered the words yourself – when discussing the

latest political issue in NB? There is a myth in NB that the population is incapable of and disinterested in political self-organization and mobilization.

Many decisions made by the Graham government during its four-year term indicated that they believed such stereotypes when attempting to slip in give-aways for corporations and cut-backs for the average citizen. Graham and Kelly Lamrock probably did not expect to find hundreds of concerned New Brunswickers protesting the end of Early French Immersion, or thousands protesting the sale of NB Power to Hydro-Quebec.

For Jean-Claude Basque of the Common Front for Social Justice, the numerous protests over the last four years are proof that New Brunswickers cannot be dismissed as being politically apathetic. He sees these protests as being very positive for NB, because they are leading to new political initiatives. Unions have historically been the leading organizations in the struggles of the working class. When Graham attempted to sell off NB Power it was the unions who stepped up and helped organize the fight back against the sale.

"This fight to keep NB Power, which was more of a populist struggle, is now transforming into one which is much deeper and more political. We are pushing the political parties to address the issue of governance and democracy," said Basque.

In response to the widespread staking of uranium claims in 2008, New Brunswickers self-organized town hall sessions around the province and posted "no uranium" signs on their lawns and business windows. The mobilizations forced the government to put some restrictions on uranium activity. Drill holes had to be capped

and uranium exploration was prohibited in areas supplying drinking water.

The Liberals failed to implement the province-wide ban on uranium exploration and mining demanded by several municipalities, environmental groups, high school students and the opposition parties.

On July 8th, Graham announced the signing of a letter of intent with Areva, a nuclear multinational from France, to look at building a second nuclear reactor at Point Lepreau. But long-time anti-nuclear activist Larry Lack remains optimistic: "We have an extraordinary opportunity in September to shut down Lepreau for good."

First Nations continue a half century of resistance to colonization. A lawsuit launched in April 2010 declares that the Federal and Provincial governments have no jurisdiction on unceded, unsundered Mi'kmaq or Métis land in the province. Stephen Augustine, Mi'kmaq Hereditary Chief of Elsipogtog Nation, the East Coast First People Alliance, long-time Métis rights defender Jackie Vautour and his son Roy Vautour, are suing the government of Canada and Her Majesty the Queen for \$13 billion for the tort of genocide committed since 1610 and continuing to this day.

Now that NB Power remains in NB hands, will we demand good green jobs in the renewable energy sector so that our family members do not have to leave NB to find work in Alberta? In the last four years, New Brunswickers have organized town hall meetings, knocked on doors, protested, and used the courts to fight back. New Brunswickers and First Nations will not back down.

G-20 a smashing success for everyone but workers

By JULIE MICHAUD AND ALEX COREY

The final G-20 Toronto Summit Declaration states, "advanced economies have committed to fiscal plans that will at least halve deficits by 2013 and stabilize or reduce government debt-to-GDP ratios by 2016". This announcement follows a year in which workers around the world paid trillions of dollars to bail out banks and large corporations. Millions of workers in Greece, France and Italy have held ongoing protests and general strikes against austerity measures allegedly implemented to reduce their deficits. These measures included attacks on pensions, thousands of lay-offs, increased sales taxes and cuts to social programs.

According to Dr. Thom Workman's recent book *If You're in My Way I'm Walking: The Assault on Working People since 1970*, the neoliberal era (1970-now) has been marked by the effort of capital to restore its rate of profit following its decline between 1966-1982. This has been largely done by driving down real wages.

Since unions, state enterprises and social programs have helped to increase and protect wages, these have been smashed, cut and dismantled. Capital moved production to areas of the world where they could pay lower wages.

While wages were being driven down, economic efficiency (the amount of a product produced per hour of labour) continued to increase. This means that workers are producing more per hour of labour than ever before.

Capitalism is a system with inherent contradictions which inevitably lead to crises. Monthly Review editors John Bellamy Foster and Fred Magdoff explain in their book, *The Great Financial Crisis: Causes and Consequences*, that the contradictory forces of declining real wages alongside increasing efficiency in production has led to the current economic crisis. Workers have insufficient money to buy all of the products being made--this is a crisis of overproduction. With the reduced ability to sell goods, capital flooded to financial markets that were increasingly empty of real content. The crisis was repeatedly held back through the elimination of financial regulations and the encouragement of workers to take on increasingly more debt. But capitalism cannot put off its crises forever and in 2008 the financial bubble burst, causing the most severe economic crisis since the 1930s.

G-20 leaders are now trapped between two forces--their need to bail out capitalism, and the resistance from the workers who refuse to pay for capitalism's crises. As the International Marxist Tendency recently wrote, "Capitalism allows a limited form of democracy only when it can afford to do so. But when capitalism is forced by its own internal contradictions to mercilessly attack the lives of working-class people and their families, the bourgeoisie [the class that owns capital] will gladly abandon 'freedom and democracy,' to which they so often have given lip-service, in exchange for protecting their own bloated privileges".

Julie Michaud of the NB Media Co-op explains her first-hand experience as a participant in the 25,000 person strong peaceful demonstrations at the G-20:

I was sure that the hundreds of police officers patrolling Toronto in the week leading up to the G-20 would have

chased after a break-away group of black bloc protesters that rampaged down Yonge Street on Saturday afternoon. The black bloc broke windows and toppled mail boxes. They spray-painted 'bomb the banks' on walls. They set ablaze police cars that had been mysteriously abandoned in the middle of the street.

But the police didn't seem to find this interesting. Instead, they busied themselves corralling peaceful protesters in a number of locations throughout the city.

It's difficult to understand how this could have happened unless it was intentional. At one point I saw people on and in two police cars that had been abandoned (later to be set on fire) in the middle of the street. A crowd was milling about with signs and placards. It seemed implausible that the heavily armed police presence would not have been able to defend a couple of vehicles.

In the end, the summit arrest total reached 1105—the largest mass arrest in Canadian history. I managed to escape arrest, but some of my friends did not. They were held in cages for 22 hours, handcuffed and cold. They were denied access to legal counsel. One arrestee said he could see the thermostat from his cage set at 10°C. Minors were held in cages with 30 adults and many of those who were detained were not even protesters. Even media were swept up and assaulted in the arrests. Several women who were detained reported that police threatened them with rape.

Amnesty International, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association and many other organizations are calling for an inquiry into the G-20 arrests. Regardless of the results of the inquiry, Harper has sent a clear message to all who would speak out against his government's attempts to shift the burden of the economic crisis onto the working class: civil liberties be damned--dissent will not be tolerated.



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