

NB RebELLEs give oppression the boot



The NB RebELLEs practice their gumbooting routine. The dance was the creation of slaves in South African mines. Today the RebELLEs use this powerful tradition to challenge capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, and all other types of oppression that plague society. Photo by Marie-Christine Allard.

By MARIE-CHRISTINE ALLARD

There are many uses for rubber boots. The obvious ones are to keep your feet dry when it rains or to keep them clean while doing yard work. Some even use them as flower pots. But the Fredericton based NB RebELLEs have found a new use: challenging capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, and all other types of oppression that plague our society. They are feminist; they are synchronized; and they call out oppressors to the catchy rhythm of stomping and boot slapping.

As any of the Gumbooting RebELLEs would explain, the physical form of gumbooting as a dance is only one aspect of this tradition. “If you wanted a sterile description of gumbooting, it is stomping, slapping, and clapping; but it is so much more than those mechanics. The richness comes from the symbolic value of its history, and its use as a tool of communication and resistance,” stated Carolyn, a gumbooter in the troupe.

Gumbooting started in the mines of South Africa when slaves were given rubber boots because it was cheaper than draining water out of the mines. The slaves were working in the dark and were forbidden to talk to each other, so they developed a type of language by stomping and slapping their boots in defiance of the slave owners. The practice has evolved out of the mines, and is now used as an art form in a spirit of celebration. As a practice that came from oppressed peoples, the RebELLEs feel that it is an appropriate medium to further the feminist struggle.

As their own form of resistance, the NB RebELLEs gumbooters weave parts of their manifesto into their performances, stating their opposition on issues of colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, and imperialism while sharing their ideas for a better world. By using the dance as a vehicle for their message, they are able to reach a much wider audience.

“Gumbooting is so accessible and draws people in. We’ve been at events where everyone seemed hostile and we

weren’t even sure if they were going to clap. But we’ve had people come to us at the end and tell us that they had never thought of these issues. A man once told us: ‘I can’t believe you managed to slip in such a feminist message.’ We’re making people aware that there is still a women’s movement and we are still not equal,” explained Carolyn.

"It is a visible part of the feminist movement, and blatant visibility is often lacking," added Keri, another member of the troupe.

The NB RebELLEs do not preach to the converted, nor do they soften their message to avoid offending the audience. They performed at two 'Women in Business' conferences on International Women's Day this year, which was attended by many women working in a corporate environment.

“We felt that it was important to speak specifically about how capitalism hurts women, so we adapted our message for it. That was the only time that I’ve actually noticed people walking out of our performance,” laughed Keri. “It was antithetical to their conference and provocative, but we wanted to show up and challenge people, challenge their assumptions, and the way their assumptions exist in the world.”

As Keri explains, most performances were well received: “I’ve had an intergenerational spectrum of people come to me and tell me ‘That was amazing!’ I even had a lady ask, ‘Can I gumboot with my cane?’”

Keri reflected on one of the most powerful moments for her, at a vigil in Miramichi, to remember the victims of the Montreal Massacre: "Right before we took the stage, some of the troupe met a survivor of domestic abuse who had just recently started talking openly about her experience. During our performance, I talk about feminism and give our definition of it, while the rest of the gumbooters stand with their fist in the air. At that point, the woman was sitting in the audience and she raised her fist with us, which then prompted the majority of the crowd to do the same. It was such a powerful moment."

For more information, check out the gumbooters' blog at gumbooters.blogspot.com.

In Brief...

- Passamaquoddy Chief Hugh Akagi is demanding that the **Point Lepreau reactor be removed** from his community's ancestral burial grounds. The area now being used to operate the nuclear generating station was once used for summer encampment, hunting and fishing grounds by the Passamaquoddy Nation.

- Fundy Baykeeper has learned that the federal pesticide regulator has granted **approval for the use of pesticide deltamethrin**, known by its trade name Alpha Max, to combat sea lice outbreaks on NB salmon farms. This approval comes despite concerns Environment Canada raised about deltamethrin last fall.

- Statements about **wetlands hindering development** in the city of Fredericton made by Mayor Brad Woodside in September led to many letters of concern being published in The Daily Gleaner. "It is of great concern to read that the Mayor of Fredericton is promoting the destruction of wetlands within city limits, but also leading a province-wide initiative to lessen their protection," said Caroline Lubbe-D'Arcy, an organizer with Friends of the UNB Woodlot. "Buffers are standard practice; otherwise pollutants and runoff impact the wetland being protected."

- Over 300 women marched on the 10th Anniversary of the **World March of Women** in Fredericton on Oct. 23rd.

- On Oct. 20th, people wore purple in memorial of the **Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered youth** in the U.S. and Canada who committed suicide in September due to homophobic abuse in their homes and schools. Purple represents Spirit on the LGBTQ flag. "This should be a tragic reminder that we need to step up to the plate and ensure that youth are not harassed or bullied for any reason including their sexual orientation," said Rob Frenette, co-founder of BullyingCanada.ca

- The Canadian government is negotiating the **Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA)** with the European Union. The Canada-E.U. free trade agreement would interfere with local and municipal policies for the first time and according to the Trade Justice Network, “our mayors and municipal councilors are not part of the negotiations. Policies designed to maximize public spending by considering the social as well as economic benefits of local sourcing or local hiring, would be banned. Municipal services, including water and energy utilities, would be restricted in the same way, while European public-private partnerships would get new guarantees in municipal tendering to the possible detriment of local public services.”

- Bill C-300, legislation that would pull public funding from **Canadian mining companies** shown to have committed human rights abuses in their operations abroad, was narrowly defeated by six votes in its third reading in Parliament on October 27th.

- On Thanksgiving Day, about 125 **migrant workers** marched 50 kilometres from Leamington to Windsor, Ontario, to draw attention to living and working conditions of migrant workers who grow and process our food. Migrant workers demanded status, an end to exorbitant recruitment fees, better housing, safe working conditions and an end to racism and sexism in the workplace.

- A Justice of the Peace ruled **G20 arrestee Alex Hundert** broke his "no-public demonstration" bail condition by taking part in panel discussions at two universities. Hundert has declined bail conditions that would include "not expressing political views."

- A QC superior court judge upheld a labor arbitrator's decision in 2009 that **Wal-Mart** illegally fired 192 employees at its store in Jonquière, QC. Wal-Mart closed its Jonquière store less than a year after it had become the first Wal-Mart to unionize. Wal-Mart was ordered to pay indemnities to the former employees. On Oct. 15th, a Saskatchewan Court of Appeal upheld a decision to certify a union at a Wal-Mart store in Weyburn, SK.

- Canada lost its bid for a seat on the **U.N. Security Council**. Critics blame the Conservative Party's unpopular foreign policies, including decreased aid to Africa, uncritical support for Israel's brutal policies towards Palestinians, and its stance on climate change.

- Seattle Police Department opened an internal investigation into the **shooting death of aboriginal artist John T. Williams**, a woodcarver from the Nuu-Chah-Nulth First Nations on Vancouver Island. Deaf in one ear, Williams was walking downtown in Seattle and carrying his carving knife when he was shot by police four times after an officer had allegedly ordered Williams to drop the knife. It is believed Williams was wearing headphones when he was shot.



Vigils and marches were held across Canada on Oct. 4th to mark the National Day of Action for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, including in Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver and Makkovik, Labrador (shown here). In Vancouver, seven women occupied a police station, calling for an investigation into the death of Ashley Machisknic, a 22-year-old Indigenous woman from Saskatchewan who was found dead in the Downtown East Side on Sept. 15.

Community Calendar

For details and updated event listings, visit nbmediacoop.org. To list your event or to receive the community calendar by email once per week, email: community@nbmediacoop.org

Chestnut Canoe Factory in Rabbit Town: A Fredericton Icon and its Industrial Neighbourhood. A labour history talk with Carol Ferguson. Nov. 10 at 7pm at Fredericton Public Library, 12 Carleton St. Contact: 454-8891.

Family Enrichment Open Space Forum. Nov. 15th (7-9pm) and 16th (8:30-4:30pm) at the Kinsmen Centre on School St. The Forum is an opportunity to discuss the future of Family Enrichment and its role in the community. Lunch and refreshments provided. Call 458-8211 or email info@familyenrichment.ca

Invasion or Occupation? - Justice, Private Property and Brazil's Movement of Landless Workers. A public lecture by Dr. Bruce Gilbert. Nov. 18 at 4pm-5:30pm. Ted Daigle Auditorium, Edmund Casey Hall, St. Thomas University, Fredericton.

In The Time of Butterflies. YMCA International Committee will host a series of presentations followed by a film screening of “In the Time of the Butterflies” on Nov. 23 at 6:30pm at Brian Mulroney Hall, Room 102, St. Thomas University in Fredericton. This film recounts the

assassination of the Mirabal Sisters in the Dominican Republic on Nov. 25, 1960—the day now marked as the International Day for the Eradication of Violence Against Women.

Book Launch of Sanctuary: The Story of Naturalist Mary Majka. Majka, a Polish-Canadian immigrant, survived personal tragedy and incarceration at a forced labour camp during World War II to become a pioneer in Canada’s environmental movement. Mary Majka, along with her official biographer Deborah Carr, will be launching her book at the Riverview Public Library (34 Honour House Ct.) on Tues., Nov. 23 at 6:45 pm. Contact Corey Redekop at credekop@gooselane.com 1 888 926-8377.

Candlelight Vigil: National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women. Mon, Dec. 6 at 6:30 p.m. at Fr. Dan Bohan Centre, 5 Fatima Dr., next to Riverview Town Hall. Followed by a candlelight vigil at the monument at Caseley Park. Organized by: Dec. 6th Committee of the Moncton and District Labour Council. Contact: 859-0692.

Cinema Politica is a network of community and campus locals screening documentaries on issues that matter. In Fredericton, Cinema Politica returns every Friday night at 7pm at Conserver House, 180 St. John St. Cinema Politica locals also exist in Fundy, Sackville, Saint John, Moncton and Taymouth. Check out film schedules at cinemapolitica.org

Wages and welfare (continued from page 1)

The Common Front recommends sympathetic reforms, asking the Alward government to: 1) increase social assistance; 2) introduce “living wage” legislation. While these reforms would certainly be welcome, it bears remembering that the working class has never won and cannot win gains by appealing to the moral sensibilities of the bosses and their political parties. The competitive market ensures that capital must chase profits, even if the heart of an individual capitalist would like to do otherwise.

Capital cannot tolerate even the modest gains previously made by workers. The capital class continues to pay lip service to “collaborative solutions” (between business, government and workers) to problems such as poverty, but their hunt for profit relies on the existence of poverty. Poverty is the whip that forces workers to accept any job no matter how terrible. Poverty can only be eliminated by the working class coming to power through its own democratic party; in NB this is the NDP. Even the NDP, however, cannot eliminate poverty if it is elected to manage capitalism's crises; it must be backed by a mobilized membership that demands ownership and democratic control of the industries and resources.