

Fredericton: the next sanctuary city?

By TRACY GLYNN



After organizing the Rally Against Islamophobia and Deportations in Fredericton on Feb. 4, 2017 (seen here), No One Is Illegal Fredericton is focusing their efforts on making Fredericton a sanctuary city so that all people can access services without fear. Photo by Biff Mitchell.

Fredericton - A group of university students, professors and community organizers are hoping to make Fredericton the next sanctuary city.

The group, No One Is Illegal Fredericton, decided to focus on this initiative in light of U.S. President Donald Trump’s anti-immigration policies and Canada’s failure to budge on policies make life more difficult and dangerous for immigrants and asylum seekers.

“A sanctuary city is where undocumented people or people with uncertain immigration status should feel safe, where they can access city services without fear of being reported by service providers or the police to Canada Border Services Agency, and detained and deported as a consequence,” says Asaf Rashid, a third year law student at the University of New Brunswick and one of the organizers of the sanctuary city effort in Fredericton.

“Undocumented people number in the hundreds of thousands in Canada. They are refugee claimants who did not succeed in their applications. They are migrant workers, international students and visitors whose statuses expired. They are even permanent residents who lost their status on account of errors in trying to sponsor family members. They are our neighbours and friends,” says Rashid.

Over 250 people have signed an online petition supporting Fredericton becoming a sanctuary city and over 40 organizations are backing the initiative including New Brunswick’s largest public sector union, CUPE NB, faculty unions at the University of New Brunswick and St. Thomas University, the New Brunswick Refugee Clinic in Moncton and service providers such as Clinic 554 and Grace House.

No One Is Illegal Fredericton members have met with Fredericton city councillors Greg Ericson and Eric Megarity who are both supportive of the initiative. Fredericton Mayor Mike O’Brien told Global News in February that he was open to the idea.

The organizers behind the Fredericton initiative say a lot of work still needs to be done to educate people about sanctuary cities and dispel some misconceptions, namely that it asks people to break laws.

“There is nothing illegal about a sanctuary city. Immigration enforcement is under the jurisdiction of the federal government. There is no obligation under provincial law or municipal law to do the work of immigration enforcement. Municipal police are supposed to enforce the criminal code, provincial and municipal offences and court orders. That’s all,” says Rashid, “Service providers and police are fully within their rights to operated by a ‘don’t ask’ policy, where they simply do not inquire about someone’s immigration status.”

Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver and Hamilton have passed sanctuary city resolutions. Twenty-five women’s organizations

are pushing for Ottawa to become the next sanctuary city. However, as reported recently in the cities of Toronto and Montreal, there have been problems with making sure that sanctuary city principles are followed. For the organizers in Fredericton, it is important that the city not pass a symbolic motion but one that actually protects people.

Jacqueline McKnight is a social work student at St. Thomas University who links her future as a social worker to her desire to see Fredericton achieve sanctuary city status.

“People seeking asylum from all kinds of dire situations deserve, and have the right, to access services in our city without fear of racial profiling, discrimination, or undue questioning about their status. If I didn’t support and advocate for Fredericton to become a sanctuary city, I would not be adhering to my profession’s values and principles,” says McKnight.

The University of New Brunswick issued a statement in March saying that it it will welcome students from countries that are affected by Trump’s travel ban. “We played an integral part in welcoming refugees to New Brunswick last year, and UNB’s campuses are recognized by our staff, students, and communities as caring and friendly environments,” according to George MacLean, Vice-President (Academic).

While attention is focused on Trump’s anti-immigration policies, Canada has its own discriminatory policies that need to be eliminated, according to No One Is Illegal chapters and migrant justice organizers across the country. The groups are calling for the end of the Third Safe Country Agreement that denies people who enter the U.S. or what’s considered a “safe country” from seeking asylum in Canada. Another target for elimination for the groups is the Designated Countries of Origin list that prohibits people from entering Canada if they are from a country considered to be “safe” on the list. Canada signed the 1951 Refugee Convention that states that all people fleeing persecution should be granted asylum.

No One Is Illegal Fredericton expressed these concerns to Fredericton MP Matt DeCoursey on Feb. 4, the day of the cross-country rally against Islamophobia and deportations, asking him to support the scrapping of the Third Safe Country Agreement and the Designated Countries of Origin list. However, the MP has yet to respond to their concerns, making sanctuary cities an even more important goal for the organizers who say lives will continue to be lost if inhumane border policies are not abandoned.

“Sanctuary cities are an affirmation that no one is illegal. All people who desire to stay should be allowed to stay, to live with their families and be a part of our communities,” says Rashid.

Tracy Glynn is an organizer with No One Is Illegal Fredericton.

Fighting to keep New Brunswick’s health care system public

By SUSAN O’DONNELL

A new report from the New Brunswick Health Coalition documents how the province’s public health care model is on a slippery slope towards privatization and also that many advocacy groups are fighting to stop the slide.

The report, “The Creeping Privatization of Health Care in New Brunswick,” highlights Canadians’ belief that everyone should have equal access to high quality health care, with the costs paid by public funds. It points out that Canada’s universal health care system is the result of numerous hard-fought battles won by many groups and individuals in the not-too-distant past. Even with its few faults, Canada’s health care system remains a model for many countries around the world.

The New Brunswick Health Coalition report documents the trend in the province away from public health care and toward corporate provision of health services. Information in the report includes examples of privatization occurring across New Brunswick in primary health care, senior care, extra-mural care, prescription drug coverage, blood plasma, and hospital laundry, cleaning and food services. The trend towards corporate health service provision has consequences for patients, health care workers, seniors, women, Francophones and residents of rural communities.

In addition to documenting these changes, the report includes recommendations to the government to keep health care as a public service.

Two key recommendations are to invest in a primary health care system based on prevention and to expand services in primary health clinics and ensure integrated services. Indeed, the government’s NB Health Council’s 2014 Primary Health Survey found that prevention-based health care saves costs and is a more humane way to deliver health care. In contrast, the current trend to privatization by the New Brunswick government makes health care increasingly dependent on treatment — an illness-centred and profit-oriented approach to health services.

The government’s search for ways to cut the costs of health care will become more intense in the coming years. The Gallant government made New Brunswick the first among the provinces to sign a health transfer deal with the federal government that many critics have called inadequate. One of the recommendations of the NB Health Coalition report is adequate health transfers to the provinces.

Jean-Claude Basque, co-chair of the NB Health Coalition, says the current provincial government is moving more rapidly towards privatization than the previous government, and the province is experiencing “a real encroachment” of corporate health care. At the same time, he points out that advocacy groups are continuing their fight to ensure that people and not profits are the main focus of New Brunswick’s health system.

The report highlights many successes of non-profit advocacy groups in the province fighting the privatization of health care, including labour unions, the New Brunswick Midwives Association, TransAction NB, and citizen groups including the Concerned Citizens of Charlotte County and residents in Caraquet organizing to save their hospital services.

One example of the privatization trend highlighted in the report is the Gallant government’s decision to turn over management of provincial hospital food, cleaning and patient transportation services to an international corporation. That decision is being opposed by public health care advocates. As reported in an earlier NB Media Co-op story (Feb. 7), the NB Council of Hospital Unions (CUPE local 1252) is leading the struggle to slow down or stop the privatization of these hospital services. CUPE is one of the many unions working together to keep corporations out hospitals.

Senior care facilities and home support services is another focus of the report. The group advocating for seniors in the province is the Coalition for Seniors and Nursing



The NB Council of Hospital Unions, CUPE 1252, opposes the privatization of health care. CUPE 1252 members, shown here, were rallying to save public health care at MP Robert Goguen’s office in Moncton in 2015. Photo from CUPE 1252.

Bisexual NB man blocked from making life-saving liver donation

By ABRAM LUTES



Kody Carlson (left) speaking with Abram Lutes (right) at the University of New Brunswick. Photo submitted.

Kody Carlson is a 26-year-old bisexual New Brunswick man studying Social Work at St. Thomas University. This year, his grandfather developed a fatal liver condition, which could be remedied with a donation of a liver from a male relative. Despite appearing to be an ideal candidate, Carlson was barred from donating a portion of his liver due to his sexual history. Health Canada maintains a series of bans which Carlson and many other LGBTQIA+ people and activists feel are discriminatory.

According to Health Canada, a man cannot donate blood for at least a year after their last sexual encounter with another man, and cannot donate organs for at least five years. There is also a lifetime ban on sperm donations. In order for Carlson to donate his liver, he would have to receive an exemption from his grandfather’s physician, after discussing with his grandfather the supposed risks of receiving a transplant from his bisexual grandson.

Carlson, who is already out to his grandfather, declared “it’s unfortunate that in 2017 in Canada, being gay means that when your grandfather is ill, you end up having to discuss your sex life with him.” Carlson gave this statement during a recent interview.

The NB Media Co-op sat down Carlson, who has had significant media coverage of his situation, to discuss some of the themes he feels should have increased media attention. Given that Valentine’s Day was just around the corner, he mentioned the way heteronormative perceptions of gay and queer relationships have affected coverage of his situation: “So much of this has been about sex. It ignores that there’s real love in the gay community, real relationships.”

Carlson believes Health Canada’s bans are based on misconceptions about the AIDS crisis of the 1980s,

which tend to attribute blame to the queer community for the spread of the disease to North America. Carlson recommends the book, *How to Survive a Plague* (2016), by David France, which chronicles the queer community’s response to the AIDS epidemic and presents alternatives to the implicitly homophobic narratives about the origins of the AIDS virus.

Concrete solutions to this situation are not getting enough attention, according to Carlson. In many of his mainstream interviews, journalists have declined to publish his statements about Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), a drug recently approved in 2016 by Health Canada that Carlson believes should be widely available since it can stop HIV from taking hold and spreading throughout the body. Taking PrEP daily can reduce the risk of getting HIV from sex by more than 90%, according to the US Center for Disease Control.

Due to the drug’s elevated cost, many people are not able to afford PrEP. Carlson believes that the government of Canada should end the implicit ban on organ donations by gay and bisexual men and instead subsidize the cost of PrEP so that it is widely available to all sexually active Canadians. He calls existing nods to improving the policies “lip service.” “In a couple of months, Health Canada will be reviewing their policies. They’re also calling for more research on the possible transmission of HIV by gay men, however, there’s already been a lot of research done to disprove these homophobic policies and the ideas they engender.”

There are organizations like the Davie Buyer’s Club (based in Vancouver), which help interested people purchase generic versions of PrEP from India, but this involves navigating legal grey areas as the drug must be delivered to the United States and transported across the border.

Carlson believes that if prices for PrEP remain high, the government will have to become involved to guarantee access: “This drug costs a thousand dollars a month. However, if the government were to increase access to this incredible preventative method then we could, effectively, eradicate HIV in a matter years.”

Carlson says he is pessimistic about the Trudeau government making significant changes to its policies, but he says he will continue to bring awareness to his situation and advocate for the ban to be scrapped so he can potentially save his grandfather.

Abram Lutes is a second year student at Renaissance College, also pursuing a double minor in sociology and anthropology at the University of New Brunswick. He is a member of the board of directors of the NB Media Co-op.

Mount Allison University students stage protests to demand fossil fuel divestment. Mount Allison University students in Sackville occupied the quad on their campus on March 20 then staged a “die-in” at the university’s administration building on March 22 to demand that the university divest from fossil fuels. The “die-in” was done to represent the victims of oil and gas exploitation. Before the “die-in,” Divest MTA leaders Tina Oh and Alex Lepianka asked Robert Campbell, the university’s president, to begin the process of divestment. Campbell responded, “It’s not my role.”

Irving vs. Poitras. J.D. Irving’s legal counsel, William McDowell, wrote a letter of complaint to CBC’s Ombudsman about Jacques Poitras, CBC’s provincial affairs correspondent’s Twitter activity. McDowell alleged that activity on Poitras’ CBC Twitter account and the account that he uses to promote his books place him in a conflict of interest because he was using his reputation as a reporter to sell his books, including his 2014 book, *Irving Vs. Irving: Canada’s Feuding Billionaires and The Stories They Won’t Tell*. The company asked that Poitras stop tweeting and be banned from covering Irving-related stories. The Ombudsman found that, “the reporter’s work fell well within the bounds of balance and analysis. The question of potential perception of conflict of interest is more complicated, though. There is no need to stop tweeting or reporting, but there is a requirement for vigilance.”

Irving to pay \$202 million less in taxes. A new tax assessment by the province on Irving’s Canaport Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) property in Saint John slashed what the company has to pay to the city. The company will pay about \$202 million less in 2017, which also happens to be the first year Irving Oil is scheduled to pay full taxes on the property to the city. The tax reduction is the largest single-year reduction in the assessed value of a property in New Brunswick’s history.

Long-time peace activist, Gloria Paul, 79, dies. Gloria Paul passed away on March 18, 2017. She was a survivor of the London Blitz during World World 2, a compassionate nurse, a lifelong peace activist with Project Ploughshares and Voice of Women for Peace, a founder of the Fredericton Peace Coalition, advocate for a Department of Peace, a voice for Agent Orange survivors and an opponent of U.S. bases and glyphosate spraying. Paul lived in Hoyt, next to CFB Gagetown, for over 40 years. She received the Milton F. Gregg Award for Environmental Activism from the Conservation Council of New Brunswick, the YMCA Peace Medallion and an honorary degree from St. Thomas University in 2008. Paul, who experienced war as a child, never accepted that war is inevitable and firmly believed that peace is always possible.

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Fighting to keep health care system public

Home Residents’ Rights. Cecile Cassista, the Coalition’s executive director, believes that the fight to stop privatization of health services is critical. “No question, if the government reduces the quality of services it will affect seniors,” she says. “When seniors are in the hospital they need good nutrition.” Cassista pointed to the example of Manitoba that had an unsuccessful experience with privatized hospital food services: “The experience proved that privatization at its best does not work.”

The Coalition for Seniors and Nursing Home Residents’ Rights has demonstrated what sustained advocacy can accomplish. The group formed in 2004 to begin a successful fight to change the formula for fees for nursing home residents. In the 13 years since then, it has accomplished much more for seniors. “Look at the list of programs for seniors on the province’s website. They are there because we advocated for them,” said Cassista. She believes the big struggle now for seniors in the province is home care.

The NB Health Coalition report’s recommendations for senior and home support services include investing in public long-term care facilities and abandoning the public-private partnership model in long-term care facilities, supporting the different needs of seniors including dementia care, increasing funding for healthy food for seniors in nursing homes, better coordination of care for seniors, and investing in implementing the Home First strategy so that more seniors can stay in their homes. Each of these recommendations will save costs by supporting well-being as an alternative to treating ill health by profit-centred corporations.

Another current example of advocacy to fight privatization of health services is the collective response to the plan to operate corporate plasma collection clinics in the province. The NB Health Coalition is coordinating a letter opposing these plans to the media, members of the legislature and parliament, and the provincial political parties. At press time the letter has been signed by 25 organizations including unions, the Canadian Labour Congress, the Canadian Federation of Students and other student groups as well as Acadian groups, religious groups, seniors groups, among others. All these organizations agree that a corporate blood and plasma service would directly compete with the non-profit Canadian Blood Services in New Brunswick and have a negative impact on the availability of blood and plasma in the public health system.

Basque believes that public advocacy will continue to be necessary to stop the privatization trend. “If there is no public outcry to protect our health system, we will lose it,” he says. Basque encourages everyone interested in this issue to read their report and then talk to their MLA about it. People who are members of an organization can encourage their organization to take a position on the issue.

Susan O'Donnell is a researcher based in Fredericton and a bargaining group executive member of the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada (PIPSC) union.

Community Calendar

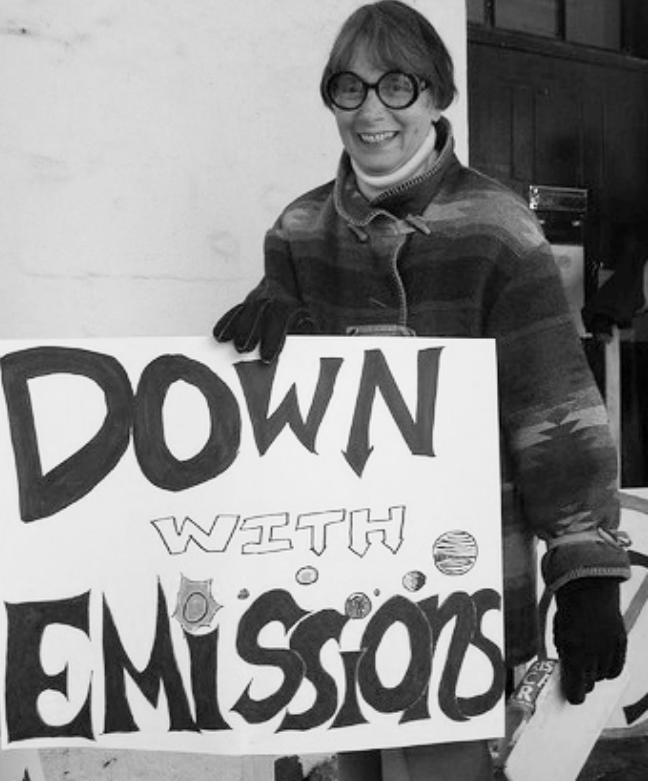
To list your community event, email info@nbmediacoop.org. For an updated listing of events, check nbmediacoop.org.

Migrant Dreams. Friday, April 28 at 7pm at Tilley Hall Auditorium, UNB Fredericton. A film about migrant workers in Ontario. Hosts: No One Is Illegal Fredericton and Cinema Politica Fredericton. A Mayworks Festival event. Contact: noiifredericton@gmail.com.

Andrea Bear Nicholas on the Role of Colonial Artists in the Dispossession and Displacement of the Maliseet. Thursday, May 4 at 7pm at Conserver House, 180 Saint John St., Fredericton. Organized by No One Is Illegal Fredericton. A Mayworks Event. Contact: noiifredericton@gmail.com.

Borderless Solidarities Workshop. Saturday, May 6 from 10am to 4pm at the Fredericton Public Library. Learn more about sanctuary city and what “no one is illegal” means. Organized by No One Is Illegal Fredericton. A Mayworks Festival event. Contact: noiifredericton@gmail.com.

Gloria Paul participating in a day of action against climate change in Fredericton in 2007. Photo submitted.



In Brief



Mt. A President Robert Campbell stepping over students staging a die-in to demand the university's divestment from fossil fuels on March 22, 2017. Photo by Bruce Wark.

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