



The Brief

Vol. 10 No.7

A publication of the NB Media Co-op

April 2019

nbmediacoop.org

“How short are we today?”: Nursing home workers

By BRIAN BEATON



New Brunswick’s nursing home workers and their supporters rally outside the courthouse in Fredericton on March 15, 2019. Photo by Simon Ouellette.

What do most workers do when arriving at work each morning? What is “normal” discussion in offices and workplaces? Different workers attending a rally on March 15 in Fredericton to support New Brunswick’s nursing home workers, raised the concept of “short” over and over in discussions.

Addressing the shortage of workers in the nursing homes is a primary concern. One worker from Saint John attending the Fredericton rally commented that the first question they hear as they arrive for work at their nursing home is: “How short are we today?”

Improving working conditions and wages are the main demands by the workers in these homes. The union’s objectives, as described by a CUPE union executive member, are to make the positions more attractive so others want to fill existing vacant positions and to reward existing workers for doing the difficult work required of them.

After 28 months without a contract and consistently worsening work conditions, a near unanimous strike mandate was given by union members to the CUPE contract negotiators on March 7, a week before the rally. Union members hoped the strike mandate would prompt positive movement by the management of the New Brunswick Association of Nursing Homes to solve these issues. However, instead of talking with the union, the government reacted with a court injunction that prevents any strike action until March 19.

On the morning of March 15, both parties were in court while the rally happened outside the Fredericton courthouse.

The union is attempting to overturn the injunction, and the Progressive Conservative government is attempting to extend it. Union representatives from different locals came together to demand fair and just negotiations along with the right to strike.

One worker at the rally told the story of his parent who is living in a nursing home. His family member told him to get out there and protest the existing working and living conditions that workers and clients are experiencing in the homes. An immediate need is for more workers to fill the “shorts” in staffing. To attract more workers into this critical service, wages must increase so young people and family wage earners are able to take on this challenging work.

Other front line workers at the protest spoke about management and the government needing to change their priorities so the workers and the residents become their primary concern. Every union member involved in these work actions is determined to see justice served for all the workers and the people living in New Brunswick nursing homes. They hope management and the government will join them in creating a just and healthy living environment for New Brunswick elders.

Workers want to change the narrative in the nursing homes — instead of being driven to exhaustion by an unjust system, and talking about being “short,” they want to be sharing stories with their fellow workers and the residents about their histories, activities and futures in New Brunswick.

Brian Beaton is the NB Media Co-op calendar coordinator.

Fredericton vigil for Christchurch: “All people are connected as in one body. If one part gets hurt all the other parts will feel the pain”

By GÜL ÇALIŞKAN

Around midnight on Friday, March 15, the day of the massacre in Christchurch, New Zealand, No One Is Illegal Fredericton sent out a call for solidarity. In response, more than one hundred people gathered the next evening for a vigil in front of Fredericton City Hall. As they greeted each other, many were visibly emotional, with their sorrow reflected in the signs they held: “#Hello Brother,” “Say NO to Extremists,” and “Standing with Christchurch.”

No One Is Illegal Fredericton welcomed everyone, inviting the attendees to share their thoughts and feelings. Many Muslim and non-Muslim members of our community came up, one after the other, speaking of their grief, their longing for peace, and the power of love. Members of the Fredericton Islamic Association expressed their dream of a world free of hatred.

Mohammad Bakhsh spoke of the complex challenges dramatized by the tragedy in New Zealand: “The terrorist attack in Christchurch is an expected outcome of the many Islamophobia campaigns and anti-immigrant policies we see around the world. It’s also a result of the international silence regarding the crimes of dictators in the Middle

East. This silence in the face of hate encourages others to participate in crimes against Muslims who become refugees or immigrants.” Bakhsh also spoke of the important role that the media plays in publicizing racist and divisive views.

Other speakers followed, offering messages from their hearts, including several non-Muslims, all of them very emotional, but determined to stand in solidarity for protecting Muslim members of our community. David Coon, leader of the Green Party of New Brunswick and MLA for Fredericton South, expressed an emotional call for unity: “We need to ensure that we see each other as brothers and sisters.” In closing, he said: “God bless. I love you all.”

A teenager approached, politely asking “May I?” before addressing the large gathering. This high schooler, 15-year-old Hala Bakhsh, had come to Fredericton with her family from Syria two years ago. Her message was brief and powerful:

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Feds told to take Nashwaak’s fish-bearing brooks off the list for Sisson’s mine waste

By TRACY GLYNN

Fredericton – A coalition of Indigenous leaders, scientists and conservationists joined forces on Feb. 27 to protest the Trudeau government’s move to allow Northcliff’s Sisson mine project to use two fish-bearing brooks as dumping grounds for its toxic waste.

The public had until March 18 to comment on the federal government proposal to list parts of Bird Brook and the West Branch of Napadogan Brook on Schedule 2. If the government adds these brooks to Schedule 2, an amendment to the Metal Mining and Diamond Effluent Regulations of the Fisheries Act, the brooks will no longer enjoy environmental protections and can be used for Sisson’s mine waste.

Lawrence Wuest, an ecologist and resident of the Upper Nashwaak Watershed, noted that, “this recent recommendation by Environment and Climate Change Canada, and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to permit destruction of 16 km of fish-bearing streams in the Upper Nashwaak Watershed in order to facilitate the Sisson mine project is not only contrary to good science, but the decision also ignores currently recommended best practices in the mining industry.”

“The decision fails to consider the consequences of the demonstrably bad business case associated with this venture. The inevitable financial failure of this mine will leave the province with an environmental mess and unmanageable cleanup bill for decades to come,” added Wuest.

The proposal to sacrifice the brooks for Sisson’s mine faced widespread local opposition during a public meeting in Stanley last year.

Lois Corbett, the Conservation Council of New Brunswick’s Executive Director, said that it is important for people to continue to participate in public processes and is encouraging the public to reiterate their calls to the federal government to protect the Nashwaak’s fish-bearing brooks by sending letters through the Conservation Council’s website during the public comment period.

The federal government has done a disservice to the public by failing to conduct a rigorous scientific assessment of alternative technologies for managing the mine’s waste, according to Peter Toner, President of the Nashwaak Watershed Association.

“The mine will be forever. The mine’s waste will have to be managed forever,” said Nathan Wilbur, a geomorphic engineer with the Atlantic Salmon Federation, who is opposed to the mine’s risky waste disposal and considers the fish habitat compensation plans to be insufficient.

The Nashwaak River is home to the endangered Atlantic salmon, American eel and other fish.

“The Nashwaak River is important to the lives of so many people. If the tailings dam fails, there is no recovery from this type of destruction as we have seen in the Mount Polley disaster. No amount of money will ever be enough to pay for the destruction of our watershed,” said Earl Brewer, a local businessman, philanthropist and native of Greenhill, a community near the proposed Sisson mine site.

Ron Tremblay, Wolastoq Grand Council Chief, and Wolastoq Grandmother Ramona Nicholas showed the



A growing coalition of Indigenous leaders, scientists and conservationists wants the Canadian government to protect Nashwaak’s fish-bearing brooks from mine waste at a media conference on Feb. 27, 2019 in Fredericton. Photo by Matthew Hayes.

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It’s membership month at the NB Media Co-op!

The NB Media Co-op, the producer of The Brief, turns ten years old this year! Here are five reasons to support another decade of independent media in New Brunswick.

1. In New Brunswick, the daily newspapers are almost entirely owned by one company, Brunswick News, an Irving family company that hold interests in many other sectors of the economy. As an independent non-profit co-operative, we cover stories from the perspectives of those ignored or misrepresented in corporate media, including workers, Indigenous land and water defenders, students, and many other equity-seeking groups. Coverage of marginalized voices and un(der)reported stories is key to a healthy democracy.

2. We rely on membership dues and donations from individuals and organizations such as labour unions to sustain our work. With more support, we will be able to grow and enhance our news coverage and increase the distribution reach of our print broadsheet, The Brief, and pay our news writers for their stories. In the past year, we formed a partnership with RAVEN (Rural Action and Voices for the Environment) to increase our capacity to cover stories about the environment and rural issues over the next four years.

3. We also hope to bring more thought-provoking events on critical issues to New Brunswick audiences like we have in the past. Some of our favourites include Masuma Khan on building solidarity, Yves Engler on Canada’s imperialist misadventures, a CanadaLand Show on forestry and the Irvings, Jennifer Brant on missing and murdered Indigenous women, Kevin Donovan on the Jian Ghomeshi affair, Alain Déneault on tax havens, Bruce Livesey on “The House of Irvings,” Justin Brake on being criminalized for reporting on Muskrat Falls, and Janice Harvey on how the Canadian media covers the environment.

4. Through our publication, The Brief, our website, social media, workshops and collaboration with community groups, we seek to create a space for various social movements to connect, get the word out, strategize, and reflect. We report with a progressive analysis and from the perspective that a more equitable and just world is possible. Our recent popular stories include profiles of Charles Thériault and his video blog site “Is Our Forest Really Ours?” and other profiles of rural activists including video interviews that present fresh perspectives in a new format.

5. Sign up before April 15 and you could win a prize: a one-year subscription to Canadian Dimension.

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Hundreds of students strike in Sackville to demand action on climate change

By BRUCE WARK



Student strikers marching to Sackville Town Hall on March 15, 2019. Photo by Bruce Wark.

Hundreds of students in Sackville rallied in the academic quadrangle at Mount Allison University on March 15 before marching to town hall to demand that all levels of government take action on climate change.

Students from Salem Elementary, Marshview Middle School, Tantramar Regional High and the university were participating in a global education strike with young people in more than 100 countries skipping classes to participate in marches and rallies.

In Sackville, students carried a wide range of protest signs including one that read “Capitalism Must Go To Save Our Planet” and another that said, “I’m Sure The Dinosaurs Thought They Had Time Too.”

As they marched east on York Street and then south on Main, the students shouted a variety of chants including “No more coal, no more oil. Keep the carbon in the soil.”

Many spoke of their fears for the future in a warming world.

“I am absolutely terrified,” said Mt. A. student Emily Steers as she spoke to the rally outside town hall. She added that when she read the latest UN report on climate change last October, she wept.

“We are in a crisis of our own making and we can stop it,” she said. “We can do this, but will we?”

Steers castigated politicians who are fighting against carbon taxes while pushing for more oil pipelines. She drew cheers when she called for a fundamental economic shift.

“Our economy needs to change right now away from an oil-based economy,” she said.

Earlier, at Mt. A., environmental science and biology student Shen Molloy warned that Sackville and vicinity is especially vulnerable to climate change because of the potential for flooding that could cut off the TransCanada highway and the CN rail line, shutting down the daily movement of goods worth \$50 million across the Chignecto Isthmus.

“It is fantastic to see so many kids here taking action against climate change. It gives me hope for the future,” Molloy said.

“Everyone is responsible for the conservation of the environment,” she added. “Ultimately the greatest threat to the environment is assuming someone else will save it.”

Quinn MacAskill, a Grade 8 student at Marshview, spoke at both rallies, reciting a poem at Mt. A. and delivering a plea for change outside town hall.

“I wish to walk through the trees without fear they will soon be cut down,” she said. “I wish to lie on the beach and let sand sift through my fingers, not plastic.”

MacAskill added that she also wished to breathe clean air and eat “food grown by loving hands in the familiar soil of my garden, not food grown by a machine thousands of kilometres away.”

She called on the town to update its Sustainable Sackville plan, noting that the plan already calls for protection of both community health and the health of natural ecosystems.

“I believe in those words,” she said, “and I think Sackville has the capability to become a leader in the province and even in our country.”

The students presented a two-page letter to MLA Megan Mitton, Deputy Mayor Ron Aiken and Councillors Bill Evans and Allison Butcher.

The letter calls on the town to declare a Climate Emergency, an action already taken by such cities and towns as Halifax, Vancouver and Kingston, Ontario.

Mitton pledged that, as the youngest member of the legislature, she would stand with the students in fighting for action on climate change.

Ron Aiken noted that town council has already taken a number of steps such as opposing the Energy East pipeline, banning single-use plastic water bottles at town hall and buying a hybrid car for the bylaw officer.

Aiken drew laughter when he said he’s so old that he participated in the first Earth Day in 1970. He added that his generation tried to do something about what they called pollution.

“We failed, we failed utterly,” he said. “Don’t do what my generation did. Do something different, have a new idea and push it forward,” he added.

Hanna Longard, one of the main organizers of the march and rallies, called on politicians and policymakers to take the steps students are asking for in their letter.

“If you say no to our asks, you’re saying no to our lives and the lives of those yet to come,” she said. “Don’t let the weight of our broken future sit on your shoulders. Take responsibility and use your positions of power to give us a fighting chance.”

Bruce Wark is a Sackville-based reporter and writes for his blog, The New Wark Times.

Nashwaak’s fish-bearing brooks

medicines that will be affected by the Sisson mine project: sweetgrass, cedar and ash.

Kenneth Francis with Elsipogtog’s Kopit Lodge supports the Wolastoq Nation in opposing the Sisson mine. He calls the mine “an abrogation of Indigenous Title and Rights. We say no to the abuse of the habitat of our finned brothers and sisters and all our other relations that will be put at risk by this project due to the design of the tailings pond and the plan to allow devastation of these two brooks, which feed into the Nashwaak rivershed and from there into the St. John or Wolastoq River.”

“Water moves and flows through deep aquifers, springs, bogs, brooks, marshes, lakes, rivers and into the ocean tides throughout Wolastokuk, our homeland. Water is life!” said Tremblay.

This article was produced with the support of RAVEN – Rural Action and Voices for the Environment.

Tracy Glynn is a doctoral researcher with RAVEN and editorial board member of the NB Media Co-op.

Fredericton vigil for Christchurch

My parents raised me and my siblings, teaching us that all people should respect each other’s religion, culture and beliefs, no matter what they look like, what skin color they have. I greet you ‘مرکبيلع مارالسلا’. Our message in Islam is peace, and our greeting is ‘peace be upon you.’ All people are connected as in one body. If one part gets hurt all the other parts will feel the pain, we share love. We appreciate everyone who came to share the pain with us. We are one family here in Fredericton. I saw Canadians showing love by standing up for Muslims. I want to thank them. The message I wanted to send is that love always wins over hate.

As a member of No One Is Illegal and a Muslim immigrant myself, I feel that Hala Bakhsh’s message summed up what vast numbers of people around the world shared that day. After hearing news that a white supremacist terrorist had killed at least 50 people and injured almost that many, the shock and collective pain brought Muslims, non-Muslims, newcomers, Fredericton-born neighbors, children, parents, and Frederictonians from all walks of life to stand together.

Those who gathered there recognized something powerful in sharing our grief, concern, and compassion. It was a demonstration that we are dedicated to holding each other and sending a message that is loud and clear: “love and peace wins over hate.” When others hurt, we are all hurt. We need to be there for each other. Many who spoke at the vigil focused on the importance of coming together in the face of racism and right-wing extremism. Whether we spoke or just listened, we all vowed that there is no room for hate in our community.

At Fredericton City Hall this Saturday evening, we responded to a collective pain that has been accumulating with each new racist attack on Muslims, Jews, or Christians in Charleston, Quebec City, Charlottesville, Pittsburgh, and each equally hate-filled act of violence by Muslim extremists. We are sick of these bigots trying to tear our multi-faith, multi-ethnic communities apart. At this point in our political environment, the victims of white supremacist racism in general, and Islamophobia in particular, are just too many.

We remember the evening of January 29, 2017, when six worshipers were killed and 19 injured at the Islamic Cultural Centre of Quebec City.

At this point, the Christchurch massacre feels just too much to bear. We will forever remember Mucad Ibrahim, age three, the youngest victim. We will remember the man who greeted the shooter, saying “Hello brother,” seconds before he was killed.

Christchurch added to the pain we have been carrying, and this collective sorrow has brought people around the world together, sharing countless messages of solidarity, such as “You are my friend. I will keep watch while you pray.” At the gathering in Washington Square Park in New York City, a sign read “To our Muslim cousins, your Jewish cousins have your back.” Maybe things are finally changing and these outpourings of mutual support are bringing us closer, as they did in our city. Because, as Hala explained, “All people are connected as in one body.” Every time a hater hates, all humanity hurts.

Gül Çalışkan is a member of No One is Illegal Fredericton.



“Hello Brother,” perhaps the last words said by one of the victims of Christchurch shooting to his killer, was written on signs at the Fredericton vigil for Christchurch on March 16 outside Fredericton City Hall. Photo by Shaimaa Mohammad.