Covered Bridge Potato Chips workers strike and boycott

The Covered Bridge workers' request to boycott has received support from Nicole O’Byrne who spelled out “union” with chips that she bought before the boycott was called. She says it is the last bag she will buy until the boycott is called off. Photo by Nicole O’Byrne.

By ASAF RASHID

Unionized workers employed by NB’s Covered Bridge Potato Chips have taken strike and boycott actions to press demands for a first contract.

While increased wages are important for the 32 striking workers who earn minimum wage, the main demand is seniority.

“In the statement (reproduced in the unfair labour practice decision), Albright said he would not deal with his company’s workers through a union, ‘I will give to my employees the things they are looking for, but never in a union environment where I feel trapped to communicate to my employees on a daily basis for fear of unfair labour practice against myself and the company. (. . .) The union wants you to feel like they’re your friends, they’re here for you. It’s bullshit.’”

The same statement was repeated later that day at the Waterville work site, after Albright stopped production to make the speech. It was read again the following day, on June 24, also the date of a planned strike vote, making the timing of Albright’s statement more problematic. On that date, despite the statement, workers voted in favor of a strike.

The New Brunswick Labour and Employment Board concluded that Albright instituted an unfair labour practice, violating the New Brunswick Industrial Relations Act: “Albright himself and on behalf of Covered Bridge sought to by intimidation, threat, or promise to induce its employees to refrain from or cease to be a member of the Complainant Union.”

Flanagan emphasizes the importance of the decision: “People have a right to organize. They have a right to belong to a union of their choice. They voted to belong to a union, and (Albright) refuses to recognize the union ... and that’s an unfair labour practice.”

The rebuke by the Labour Board did not forestall the employer’s position.

The Board forced Albright back to the table. “He had to be back at the table by September 27. We met on September 25. He presented us with a company offer with no seniority and less wages than in the first offer. We tried again on December 30. He basically said it was his final offer, take it or leave it,” says Flanagan.

The response to the final offer was a walkout and a request to consumers to boycott.

“The strike is not going to be won on a dead end street after the employees are on the picket line. So, we plan to do secondary leafleting, which is our right under the Industrial Relations Act, The Supreme Court has ruled that we can do secondary picketing. So, we plan to leaflet at stores that are selling Covered Bridge potato chips,” says Flanagan.

Flanagan is hopeful that the boycott will apply needed pressure to bring the employer back to the bargaining table. “Once he sees that there is a boycott in place, and that we’ll be leafleting in front of his customers, I’m hoping that he wants to meet.”

Asaf Rashid is a NB Media Co-op writer and editorial board member.

“‘You are loved and welcomed.’ Hundreds rally in Fredericton to welcome refugees

By TRACY GLYNN

Hundreds of people filled Fredericton City Hall’s front yard on Saturday, Dec. 12 to extend a warm welcome to Syrian refugees who will soon be arriving in the city. The rally also called to more humanely reform immigration policies and made the connections between Canada’s foreign policies and the refugee crisis.

Refugees Welcome Fredericton organized the rally. Almost 40 organizations, including the NB Federation of Labour, representing 40,000 workers in the province, unions, cultural associations, faith-based groups, social justice groups, media organizations and political party associations, endorsed the rally.

David Coon, Fredericton South’s MLA and the Green Party of New Brunswick’s Leader, endorsed the rally. Matt Decourcy, Fredericton/Oromocto’s Liberal MP, also attended.

Ron Tremblay, Wolastoq Grand Council Chief, opened the rally and reminded the crowd that Fredericton is located on unceded Wolastoq territory. He extended a welcome to Syrian refugees. The Refugees Welcome network takes indigenous sovereignty seriously and is working towards raising consciousness about the responsibilities of everyone to the Peace and Friendship treaties that exist in New Brunswick.

Asaf Rashid, a Refugees Welcome Fredericton organizer, called for Canada to bring in more refugees since Canada continues to bomb Syria and contribute to the conditions that turn people into refugees.

Through its military exports, mining companies, trade agreements and destructive climate policies, Canada is responsible for far more than the 25,000 refugees that it is promising to admit over the next few months.

There are at least 60 million refugees in the world—all of them deserving of a welcome. Many wrote heartfelt messages such as Prime Minister, Trudeau promised to stop Canada’s military intervention in Syria but Canadian fighter jets were still bombarding Syria in mid-November, according to media reports.

Layla Rahme, who came to New Brunswick as a refugee from Syria three and a half years ago and now resides in Saint John, addressed the Fredericton crowd. When she came to Canada, she says she did not imagine that her home country would become a place where she could not return. She called for peace in Syria. Rahme has a radio show on CFMH 107.3 FM called “Here is Damascus” that celebrates the beauty and culture of Syria. She says that people only hear about war in Syria.

The crowd wore yellow armbands to show that they welcome refugees. Many wrote heartfelt messages such as’

Guðið Calakson, a professor of sociology at St. Thomas University, speaking to hundreds gathered at the Refugees Welcome Fredericton rally on Dec. 12, 2015.

Photo by Erin Morton.
The plowing of the forest after the clearcutting leaves in its wake an aslant rampart, virtually slumberous hag of debris. Plowing also completes the destruction of habitat and potential food sources for wildlife in the area. “Three years after clearcutting, the companies spray glyphosate,” Babin says. “The spraying is aimed at preventing the predominantly hardwood forest that would grow naturally from re-establishing itself.”

Babin points out that the chemical eventually makes its way into the streams and, from there, into the rivers they feed. Glyphosate spraying is controversial in NB. A March 2015 report by the World Health Organization’s International Agency for Research on Cancer (WHO-IARC), stated that glyphosate damages human DNA and chromosomes, and probably causes cancer.

The report by internationally-respected scientists confirms what critics of glyphosate spraying have been saying for some time. So far, however, the provincial government has turned a deaf ear to glyphosate warnings by the globally-respected World Health Organization.

Indeed, NB’s Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Elise Cleary, was preparing to study the health impacts of spraying glyphosate when she was abruptly fired on December 1 by the Gallant government.

Six days before, on the logging road near Rosairesville, Babin had declared that Dr. Cleary was in trouble with the government cabinet ministers and DNR officials because she wanted to study the health impacts of spraying glyphosate. Babin says government cabinet ministers and DNR officials refuse to implement the recommendation of removing glyphosate from the spraying process.

“Once you clearcut the trees and haul the wood away, you leave behind a legacy of chemicals in the soil,” Babin says. “The next generation of trees grow in those chemicals.”

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Community Calendar

For details and updated event listings, visit nbmediacoop.org. To list your event, email community@nbmediacoop.org.

Noche Latina. Noche Latina is a wonderful community fundraising event that has been happening in Fredericton for decades. Featuring a traditional Central American meal and music from the region and around the world. Funds go to the Maritimes-Guatemala Breaking the Silence Network and the St. Thomas University Psychology Student Scholarship Fund. Friday, Feb. 5, at 6:00pm at the Wilmot Community Centre. Without it, we risk forgetting about African refugees, those in detention centres, migrant workers in our midst, and the many undocumented. That work has barely started.

Tracy Glynn is an organizer with Refugees Welcome Fredericton.

The “Choices to Move New Brunswick Forward” hand-out given to those who participated in the budget consultation process in Fredericton on Jan. 12 was not fooling the participants who saw the cuts to essential social services and lack of imagination in creating revenue for the province. Photo by Mark D’Arcy.

New Brunswick union representatives and supporters of the New Brunswick Teachers’ Federation held a rally at the government of New Brunswick’s public consultation on the upcoming budget at the Fredericton Convention Centre on Jan. 12. There were 569 fewer teachers in New Brunswick’s public schools than there were in 2010 and the number of combined schools has risen from 313 to 384. Per pupil spending in NB has dropped from $9961 per student in 2010 to $8043 in 2015 (figures corrected to 2015 dollars). Our students deserve better,” says Guy Arsenaault, the NB Teachers’ Association President.

Gallant talks climate change as his government continues clearcutting the forest

BY DALLAS McQUARRIE

Roger Babin who has worked all his life in NB’s woods looks over the wreckage of what used to be a forest and stream feeding the Bay du Vin River. Photo by Dallas McQuarrie.

When it comes to climate change, NB Premier Brian Gallant is “talking the talk,” but so far has refused to “walk the walk” when it comes to his government’s support for clearcutting New Brunswick’s forests.

“Climate change knows no borders. That is why we must … develop our natural resources and energy projects in a responsible way,” stated Gallant in a government media release on Sept. 1, 2015.

Far away from news conferences in plush hotel rooms and staged photo-ops where Premier Gallant talks about combating climate change, the daily roar of heavy equipment systematically clearcutting provincial forests tells a different story. The on the ground reality is that successive Liberal and Conservative governments has presided over massive deforestation by clearcutting.

Clearcutting forests drives climate change because trees play a central role in absorbing the greenhouse gases that fuel global warming. Less forest means more greenhouse gases entering the atmosphere more quickly, thus increasing both the speed of, and devastation caused by, climate change.

In her June 2015 submission to the Legislative Assembly, NB’s Auditor-General Kim MacPherson reported that 80% of all the wood cut from the province’s Crown forests in the past 20 years had been harvested by clearcutting. Critics argue that level of deforestation is simply unsustainable, and threatens to rob future generations of what has been, historically, NB’s most important natural resource.

MacPherson’s report also noted that, for over a decade, government ministers and officials in the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) have ignored a host of studies and recommendations calling for a reduction in clearcutting. Despite the fact that selective and partial cutting methods are recognized as the best management practices, NB has steadily refused to implement any kind of responsible resource development Premier Gallant talks about.

On top of it all, the stubborn failure to reform provincial forestry practices is actually costing taxpayers big money. MacPherson’s 2015 report notes that the destruction of all the wood cut from the province’s Crown forests in the past 20 years by clearcutting has cost the taxpayers an estimated $7.5 million per year. The bottom line is that for years successive Liberal and Conservative governments have been billing taxpayers for the cost of clearcutting their forest.

Rosairesville resident Roger Babin, 70, was a forestry worker for most of his life. Driving along what used to be forest in a logging road between Rosairesville and Rosairesville on December 1, Babin explains that after the forest has been clearcut, it’s then “plowed” and eventually sprayed, often repeatedly, with chemicals like cancer-causing glyphosates.

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