



# The Brief

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## 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.

“The company does not want to have seniority rights within the collective agreement,” says Carl Flanagan, national representative for United Food and Commercial Workers Canada (UFCW). Flanagan represents the striking Covered Bridge employees.

“The seniority clause we’re looking for is job security. So, if I worked there for five years and the employer hires his brother-in-law tomorrow and there’s no restriction on seniority, his brother-in-law could get 40 hours a week and he could cut me back to 25 hours. The people who have been there for five years deserve to have seniority over those who start work tomorrow,” explains Flanagan.

The workers have been in a legal strike position since June. They have been unable to come to satisfactory contract terms over the course of the last several months. A major stumbling block has been company president Ryan Albright’s attitude towards the union.

“There was a meeting in mediation on June 23. He came in and read a two-page spiel and stormed out of the room,” says Flanagan. This statement, and the circumstances surrounding it, were the subject of a successful unfair labour practice complaint by the union.

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 friend, 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 favour 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 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 in Hartland, NB. There’s not much that goes on on that street after the employees are on the picket line. So, we plan to be doing secondary leafletting, 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 leafletting 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 for more humane refugee and 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 Decourcey, 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 —the highest number of refugees ever recorded. Over half of these refugees are from Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia. Canada, the U.S., France, Russia and other European countries have recently bombed Syria. Before his election as Prime Minister, Trudeau promised to stop Canada’s military intervention in Syria but Canadian fighter jets were still bombing Syria in mid-November, according to media reports.

Layla Rahmeh, 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. Rahmeh 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



**Gül Çalışkan, 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.

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# 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 forest.

“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 have 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 charge that 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 steadfastly refused to implement the 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 our forests costs taxpayers \$7-10 million a year. The bottom line is that for years successive Liberal and Conservative governments have been billing taxpayers for the cost of clearcutting their forest.

Rosaireville resident Roger Babin, 70, was a forestry worker for most of his life. Driving along what used to be forest on a logging road between Rogersville and Rosaireville 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.

The plowing of the forest after the clearcutting leaves in its wake an all but impassible, virtually lifeless tangle 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 glyphosates,” 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 (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. Elish Cleary, was preparing to study the health impacts of spraying glyphosates when she was abruptly fired on December 7 by the Gallant government.

Six days before, on the logging road near Rosaireville, Babin had declared that Dr. Cleary was in trouble with the provincial government because it wants to keep on spraying. Both forestry companies and NB Power make extensive use of glyphosates.

Babin is the President of the People for the Protection of the Forests of New Brunswick, an organization with about 4500 members that is urging the province to stop clearcutting and begin managing the renewable resource in a responsible manner.

The clearcutting Babin and his group decry is also destroying streams and cedar swamps that are essential for the survival of deer in the winter.

“This kind of damage can’t be fixed,” Babin declares while looking over a stream that used to feed the Bay du Vin River. Ribbons, required by regulation to mark streams so that they will not be clearcut and plowed, are still visible. Contrary to provincial regulations, the stream has been obliterated.

“With so much of their habitat being wiped out, and so much poison being sprayed around, it’s no mystery why deer populations are plunging,” says Babin. Deer yards in cedar swamps here have traditionally been protected, but recent forestry agreements now allow clearcutting in those areas. That’s very hard on deer, according to Babin.

Babin says government cabinet ministers and DNR officials refuse to admit that a major cause of recent dramatic declines in NB’s deer populations is current forest management practices. Those practices encourage clearcutting and the indiscriminate spraying of glyphosates that eventually destroy wildlife habitat and food sources.

“Once you clearcut the trees and haul the wood away, the natural forest and the sustainable jobs it could provide in the province, as well as other uses like recreation and tourism, are gone forever,” Babin says.

Babin is very concerned about the wholesale destruction of New Brunswick’s heritage, and what appears to be “a real rush to get the forest cut down as quickly as possible.”

“In 40 years, I’ve never seen so much clearcutting done so fast,” he says.

*Dallas McQuarrie is a retired journalist and civil servant living on unceded Mi’kmaq territory in Kent County.*

“You are loved and welcomed”

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as “you are loved and welcomed” on cards. The messages will be translated into Arabic and given to the refugees entering Fredericton. Yona Altahir, a youth with the Iraqi Association of Fredericton, gave a heartfelt welcome to Syrian friends about to join Fredericton’s community.

Monika Stelzl is a St. Thomas University psychology professor who came to Canada 25 years ago as a refugee from Czechoslovakia. She thanked Mrs. MacDonald, a teacher in Halifax, who encouraged her to finish high school at a time when she thought she would never do so because of the many challenges she faced. She says she hopes to follow Mrs. MacDonald’s example and do the same for a refugee about to arrive in Fredericton.

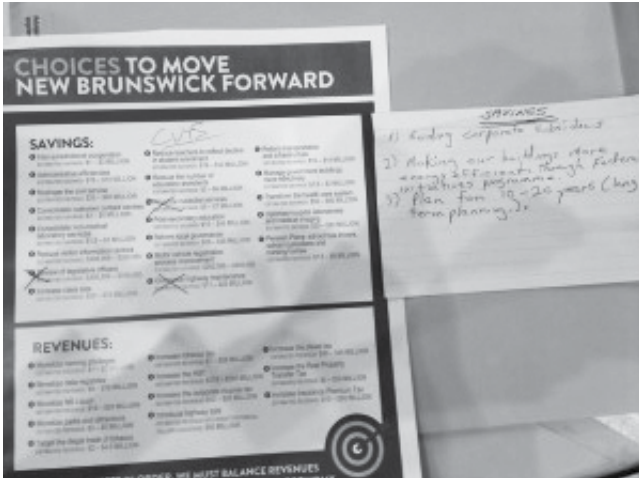
Syed Hussan, a Refugees Welcome organizer, says, “This is the moment for linking across struggles and transforming people’s care and rage towards a powerful anti-displacement, pro-migrant justice movement which puts racial, economic, gender and social justice at its centre. Without it, we risk forgetting 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.

## In Brief

Thousands of New Brunswickers are joining the call to ban **glyphosate** applications in the woods. Glyphosate was recently determined to be a probable human carcinogen by the World Health Organization’s International Agency for Research on Cancer. Hunters and outdoor enthusiasts are drawing the link between glyphosate applications, used by industry to select for softwood trees, and the dwindling wildlife populations in the woods, most notably the white-tail deer. Those wanting to ban glyphosates say that the move would create much-needed jobs in the province because human labour would be needed to mechanically remove the vegetation in the place of chemicals in plantations and along NB Power’s power lines. Wildlife and environmental groups, the scientific community and woodlot owners are calling for a new **Crown Lands and Forests Act**. In a statement sent to the provincial government on Nov. 26, 2015, the groups say a new Act must better manage the forest for water and wildlife protection, recreation, jobs and revenue.

New Brunswick union representatives and supporters protested **planned cuts to education and health care** at the government of New Brunswick’s public consultation on the upcoming budget at the Fredericton Convention Centre on Jan. 12. “There are 569 fewer teachers in New Brunswick’s public schools than there were in 2010 and the number of combined classes 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 Arseneault, the NB Teachers’ Association President.



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.

## Community Calendar

For details and updated event listings, visit [nbmediacoop.org](http://nbmediacoop.org). To list your event, email: [community@nbmediacoop.org](mailto:community@nbmediacoop.org).

**Noche Latina.** Noche Latina is a wonderful community fundraiser 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 Multicultural Association of Fredericton’s Newcomers’ Scholarship Fund. Friday, Feb. 5, at 6:00pm at the Wilmot United Church. Tickets (\$15 individual, \$30 family and \$5 child) on sale at Westminster Book Store, True Foods and at the door. Contact: [btsmaritimes@gmail.com](mailto:btsmaritimes@gmail.com).

**Cinema Politica** believes in the power of art not only to entertain but to engage, inform, inspire, and provoke social change. Cinema Politica Fredericton screens films on Friday nights at Conserver House, 180 St. John St. at 7:00pm. Check out the films and venues at: [cinemapolitica.org](http://cinemapolitica.org).

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