Private gain, public pain: trouble in NB’s Crown forests

By BRUCE WARK

Creating jobs, not just profits

Thériault says his work shows that big forestry companies at least seemed concerned about making profits than about creating as many jobs as possible.

“We’re turning our natural forests into a fibre farm,” he says, planting “cheap trees” such as black spruce that replace valuable hardwoods native to the Acadian forest.

“We’re chopping it all down and planting these cheap spruce trees to furnish a market that is based on volume and not quality.”

Thériault points, for example, to the local Groupe Savoie hardwood mill that employs 600 people and produces a variety of products including pallets, cabinet doors and wood chips. He says the mill uses about 300,000 cubic metres of hardwood while the local Irving mill uses the same volume of softwoods each year, but employs only 60 people to produce construction lumber such as two-by-fours for the U.S. market.

“Our objective is not to create work,” Thériault says of the Irving mill, “their objective is to make profit.”

In Episode 20 of his web series, Thériault visited Boisca, a company in Quebec’s Saguenay region that employs more than 700 people to make a wide variety of wood products from both softwoods and hardwoods.

“This mill in Quebec is worker-owned,” he says, “so the dollars stay in the community... and they’re cutting same amount of wood in a year but here we’ve got about 50 jobs while there they’ve got 700 jobs.”

Taxes and subsidies

Thériault’s current series ends with an episode that looks at how living companies use tax havens and complicated corporate transactions to avoid paying taxes.

The episode features an interview with Dennis Howlett of Canadians for Tax Fairness who explains how such tax avoidance schemes deprive New Brunswick of revenues needed to reduce poverty, maintain roads and finance education and health care. Meanwhile, both the federal and provincial governments are giving the Irvings and other corporate owners grants, loans and tax breaks for their various enterprises.

Last year, the auditor general reported that the province paid more in management and silviculture fees to the forestry companies than it received in royalty revenues from the trees the companies cut on Crown land.

Thériault shakes his head as he recalls starting his website project in 2012.

“I thought I could probably do it in six months,” he says. “It’s been three-and-a-half years and there’s still so much to talk about, still so much to discover.” He adds that the more he keeps digging into the way New Brunswick gives away its natural resources, the more he finds out.

“I’d like to go to other countries and see how they’re dealing with their resources,” he says, hoping that would convince New Brunswickers that things don’t have to be the way they are here.

“We’re being screwed,” he says, “and basically we’re being screwed by a company that doesn’t pay any taxes and we’re letting it happen.”

This story originally appeared in The Week Times.
Rallying for free education

The protest also pointed out the hardships faced by international students, who pay much higher tuition fees, despite offering new perspectives and added diversity to classrooms.

“Students come here and they contribute and pay taxes,” said Aditya Roshan of the UNB Graduate Students Association. They also face high fees for health insurance, he said, which is mandatory for foreign students at Canadian universities. Despite their public contributions, international students are treated differently and unfavourably by differential fees.

St. Thomas Sociology professor Matthew Hayes, who attended the rally, says tuition fees are an arbitrary barrier to entry, and pose particular hardship for students who must work to pay their school fees. “I have known of international students whose education is jeopardized because they don’t have enough time to put into their studies. Any way we can help lower income students focus on their studies and be the best students they can be is in the public interest,” he said.

Etherton underscored why abolishing tuition is so essential: “70% of those in 2020 will require a post-secondary education. College diplomas and university degrees will be the new high school diploma. Yet, what high school’s now free to all, university is only open to those who can pay, irrespective of ability to study.

“From a societal benefit perspective, citizens with degrees are more civically engaged. They are more efficient at developing new skills and they’re more effective the job market,” he said.

The reason that society should pay for education is that society benefits. It makes more sense for Canadians with higher income to be progressively taxed to fund universally accessible post-secondary education,” Etherton told the crowd. “Currently, 60 per cent of university students come from the 40 per cent of top income earners. Post-secondary education should be an equalizer rather than a reproducer of inequality.”

Patrick Colford, President of the New Brunswick Federation of Labour, and St. Thomas University history professor Robin Vose also added the rally in support of workers’ interests in providing free and accessible post-secondary education.

Colford spoke about the hardship working families face trying to support the educations they need and develop their interests to the fullest. University education is the only way they can have understood the importance of student debts, since many have graduated after years of post-secondary studies carrying crushing debt loads.

The student movement in Canada used to focus on affordable and accessible education but support of abolition of tuition fees is the new focus. It’s still important to encourage those gathered to not forget the next generation who will need their support in the struggle for post-secondary education.

With files from From the Margins.

In Brief

A 12-year fight to prevent liquefied natural gas (LNG) development in Penobscot County by the Penobscot People reached a conclusion to an end in August 2016. Bob and Linda Godfrey, of Passamaquoddy Bay Three Nation Alliance. They plan to write a book about their struggle to stop three Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) plants with files from Barb Rayer for the Saint Croix Courier.

Community Calendar

To list your community event, email info@nbmediaco-op.org. For an updated listing of events, visit www.nbmediacoop.org.

Cinema Politica believes in the power of art not only to entertain, but also to provoke social change. This winter, Cinema Politica Fredericton will screen films on climate change, indigenous movements to protect the land from Amazonia to Athabasca, and the struggles and Syrian refugees on Wednesday nights at St. Thomas University. Doors open at 7:00pm and the film screening begins at 7:30pm every second Friday night at Conserver House, 180 Saint John St., Fredericton, at 7:00pm. View the film schedule at: cinemapolitica.org/fredericton.

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The light-armoured vehicle (LAV) acquired by the Winnipeg Police Service in 2015. Fredericton city council has approved the purchase of a similar LAV. Photo: Winnipeg Police Service.

Fredericton buys light-armoured vehicle amid concerns over militarization of police force

By TRACY GLYNN

The light-armoured vehicle (LAV) acquired by the Winnipeg Police Service in 2015. Fredericton city council has approved the purchase of a similar LAV. Photo: Winnipeg Police Service.

Fredericton city council’s decision to buy a light-armoured vehicle (LAV) for the Fredericton Police Force has generated a flurry of discussion from residents on social media as well as criticisms from those who study the militarization of police forces and the criminalization of dissent.

City council unanimously approved the city’s $112.3 million budget for 2016 on Dec. 11, which included a six year lease of a LAV at a cost of approximately $58,000 a year.

Michael Bouzides, a criminologist at St. Thomas University, told CBC on Dec. 14, 2016 that such armored vehicles are not needed in Fredericton and argues that a LAV does little for public safety or rescue and likely would not have saved the RCMP officers killed by the Moncton shooter Justin Bourque.

Stephanie Whalen posted on the Fredericton Daily News Facebook page: “Why in the world does the force need this? Parades?”

Louis Turgeon, on the same Facebook thread, pointed out that the RCMP division in Fredericton already has such an armoured tactical vehicle and a “battalion of armored vehicles... to 20 minutes away” at CFB Gagetown.

Some on the Facebook thread supported the decision, saying that the police force should be given the equipment verifiable threats.

Other posts noted that it would do little to reduce Fredericton’s high rate of violence against women or for police forces in other jurisdictions. There are no visible connections with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, both of which have a history of human rights abuses against civilian populations. Saudi Arabia uses the same LAV in its war against Yemen and to police their own population. In 2011, Saudi Arabia invaded the neighbouring kingdom of Bahrain to end peaceful demonstrations calling for democratic reforms during the Arab Spring.

The LAV is designed to withstand high-calibre rifle and hydraulic fracturing. These protests have reached pipeline construction, bitumen extraction and processing, the militarization of local law enforcement, and not the spread of the “militarization” within U.S. police forces but “not part of the discourse that frames the Fredericton context for the lease of a LAV.”

In an email to the NB Media Co-op, Ericson noted that Fredericton Police have promised permanent members of SWAT teams or other emergency response teams (ERT). Members of Fredericton’s Police’s ERT serve in that capacity voluntarily and normally do not join the police force with a focus on community policing.

“...The ERT does work outside of Fredericton for other, levels of government and other community partners. The LAV increases their capacity to do such work and is of use as an unconventionally mobile and mobile tactical vehicle... is for the purposes of substituting other communities’ residents,” says Ericson. According to Ericson, the lease of a LAV is important for the Fredericton Police Force itself. He says that the new threats in the Fredericton policing environment can be verified from the real estate agents, merchants, and businesses that report day-to-day threats and growth and proliferation of organized/syndicated crime groups, whether motor cycle gangs or other mob related organizations. These are real threats in Fredericton.

Concern about organized crime was also used by Ericson and other city councillors to justify a $150,000 payment to the owner of a downtown nightclub, and the purchase of the former North Star Sports Bar Pub on the city’s Northside.

Police forces across Canada have been acquiring military equipment, including LAVs and military-style rifles. Police in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia received a military-style rifle for their LAV from the Canadian Forces. A year later, the Windsor, Ontario police force acquired a similar demilitarized LAV from the armed forces. Ottawa, Hamilton and Winnipeg police forces have also bought armored vehicles. Sound cannons that cause stress and fear are also used in Canada. Ericson described using a LAV before the G8 and G20 summits in 2010, by the RCMP during the 2010 Winter Olympics and by the Montreal police in 2014.

“The rate of serious crime in Canada is the lowest since 1969 and has been falling steadily for the last 11 years. The use of LAVs by law enforcement is a misnomer for the political and public oversight of the police services,” wrote Branka Markovic for Project Ploughshares, a peace organization, in 2016.

“...The policing fraternity rarely transcends its narrow and hydraulic fracturing. These protests have reached pipeline construction, bitumen extraction and processing, the militarization of local law enforcement, and not the spread of the “militarization” within U.S. police forces but “not part of the discourse that frames the Fredericton context for the lease of a LAV.”

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