



The Brief

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

By BRUCE WARK



Charles Thériault. Photo from Is Our Forest Really Ours website.

“We’re being screwed here,” Charles Thériault says from the big pink chair in his straw bale house at Kedgwick River, northeastern New Brunswick. Thériault is talking about provincial Crown forests and his three-and-a-half year campaign to convince New Brunswickers that we’re giving those public forests away.

“We’re letting it happen, our governments are letting it happen,” he adds. “We have no control over our natural resources.”

Thériault is using his website, *Is Our Forest Really Ours?*, to document the investigation he’s been conducting since 2012.

He says his work began when he discovered that the big forestry company, J.D. Irving Ltd., was diverting some of the Crown wood it had been allocated away from its Kedgwick sawmill.

“The mill was only working about eight months a year, rather than 12 and only one shift,” he says, adding that over a three-year period, the local economy had lost more than \$2 million in work and wages.

Media not interested

When Thériault tried to interest the New Brunswick news media in the story, he was ignored by journalists and editors except for those at the French-language daily, *L’Acadie Nouvelle*.

“CBC, CTV/ATV, I contacted all of them, newspapers, of course the Irving papers, and none of them reacted, even when I called them back, they wouldn’t talk to me.”

Thériault approached the New Brunswick Federation of Woodlot Owners who also feel victimized by the big forestry companies.

“For five months, I got a salary, they bought the camera and I just started producing,” he says.

Currently, his website has 28 episodes consisting of filmed interviews with a wide range of experts on all aspects of forestry including the Crown forests that are managed by the private companies that lease them.

Client state

In his first episode, Thériault interviewed William Parenteau, a University of New Brunswick professor who describes New Brunswick as “a client state,” a place where dominant industries have more power than the provincial government.

Thériault speaks passionately about this idea as we talk by his wood stove in Kedgwick River.

“If a corporation wants to control a country, it takes control of their natural resources,” he says, “and then they take control of the legislature, then they control information and the media.”

Thériault uses the term “corporate capture” rather than “client state,” but for the him, the results are the same for New Brunswick.

“We’re kept blind and we’re kept stupid, misinformed and we don’t have access to the revenues from our resources,” he says — all themes addressed in Episode 21 of his web series.

Creating jobs, not just profits

Thériault says his work shows that big forestry companies are more 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 on 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.

“Their 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 visits Boisaco, 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 Irving 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 Wark Times.

Fredericton students continue to mobilize for universal access to post-secondary education

By NAJAT ABDOU-MCFARLAND

A small but loud group of students and supporters rallied at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton on November 2, 2016 as part of a cross-country mobilization demanding universal access to post-secondary education. The students marched to the Legislature where their chants could be heard during the Premier’s Speech from the Throne.

The Fredericton rally was spearheaded by the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) and the UNB Graduate Students’ Association and supported by the Fredericton chapter of the Young New Democrats and the NB Federation of Labour.

This action was the latest in a long history of student action in the province for universal access to post-secondary education.

In the spring of 2016, Université de Moncton students descended on the Legislature wearing t-shirts with the figure 35,200 – the average debt of New Brunswick students upon completion of their first degrees.

The Fredericton Young Greens organized a rally to abolish tuition at St. Thomas University while Justin Trudeau visited the campus days before the Federal Election in 2015.

Unitel, a group of students at St. Thomas University, distributed red squares, a symbol of the student movement, on campus and organized a rally in 2010.

St. Thomas University students later formed groups called the Red T Movement and Students Against STUition. The students recognized how tuition and fees were reproducing social inequalities.

Students like Jory Ulhman struggle with the stresses and challenges of student debt: “There are a number of ways that student debt is affecting my life. The first is the anxiety that has come with watching my older brothers and sisters deal with their student debt. Not a week goes by when I don’t think of the massive monthly payments I will have to make over the next decade or two and this stress accumulates with the everyday stresses of being a full-time student I already am facing. It also has forced me to work over 40 hours/week and in 12-hour shifts in a factory for four months every summer to keep my student debt down as well as has forced me to work during my undergraduate degree.”

“The 2013 Statistics Canada numbers tell us average student debt in New Brunswick was \$39,500, one of the highest rates in Canada” said David Etherington of the CFS. He noted that the Canadian average student debt is closer to \$28,000. But it should also be noted that some graduate students are carrying a debt load of \$60,000 and higher.

“Part of the reason for that is we have some of the highest fees in the country,” Etherington said. “For students who go in to post-secondary system and come out with debt, it means they are putting off life decisions. Some reports say students are putting off life decisions for up to ten years, such as starting a family, buying a house, buying a car, starting a business.”

The economic impacts of high tuition fees also include reproducing or exacerbating existing levels of social inequality.

“Students from more marginalized backgrounds such as low-income, newcomers and Aboriginals tend to be debt-adverse so the student debt system deters them from even starting sometimes,” said Etherington.



Jon Debly, general secretary for the Fredericton Young New Democrats, speaking at the rally for free post-secondary education on Nov. 2, 2016 in Fredericton. Photo by Najat Abdou-McFarland.

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 2017 on Dec. 11, which included a six-year lease of a LAV at a cost of approximately \$58,000 a year.

Michael Boudreau, a criminologist at St. Thomas University, told CBC on Dec. 14, 2016 that such armoured 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 J Division in Fredericton already has such an armoured tactical vehicle and a “bataillon of armed military vehicles about 20 minutes away” at CFB Gagetown.

Some on the Facebook thread supported the decision, saying that the police force should be given the equipment needed to do their job.

Other posts noted that it would do little to reduce Fredericton’s high rate of violence against women or improve the safety of residents walking on icy sidewalks, which the city claims it cannot afford to keep clear.

The LAV destined for Fredericton is known as a Gorkha and is made by Terradyne Armoured Vehicles of Newmarket, Ontario. The company boasts international 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 rounds and explosions, including land mines.

Greg Ericson, Fredericton city councillor and chair of the city’s finance and administration committee, defends the purchase of the LAV as part of community policing. “Fredericton Police Chief Leanne Fitch is an international expert on contemporary community policing. It was asked for by our Chief, for purposes consistent with community policing, under the direct oversight of the appropriate civic authority that has a vested and permanent interest in maintaining community policing outcomes in

Fredericton,” says Ericson.

According to Thom Workman, a political science professor at the University of New Brunswick, the purchase fits more with a trend towards the militarization of police forces in North America than it does with community policing principles.

“As protests have become more politically acute, the militarized capacities of local police forces have risen accordingly. Protests have risen in the wake of police killings and the failure of the legal system to prosecute murderers seeking refuge behind a police badge,” says Workman. “Rather than responding with respect for the right to protest, police forces have responded with aggressive posturing and threatening resolve, intimidation rather than a respect for basic human dignity. It is not difficult to understand why the National Association of Police Organizations endorsed the bigoted, sexist, ‘law and order’ candidacy of Donald Trump in the recent US election.”

Ericson says he agrees with Workman’s analysis of the spread of the “militarization” within U.S. police forces but says that was “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 does not have police staff that are permanent members of SWAT teams or other emergency response teams (ERT). Members of Fredericton’s Police’s ERT serve in that capacity as volunteers and normally do other jobs with the police force with a focus on community policing work.

“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 supported by a business case for the remuneration of related expenses that does not put Fredericton taxpayers on the hook for subsidizing other communities’ residents,” says Ericson.

According to Ericson, the lease of a LAV is important for the “safety and protection of our Fredericton Police Force staff.” He says that the new threats in the Fredericton policing environment can be verified from media reports on gun and drug seizures, “Not to mention 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 decommissioned LAV from the Canadian Forces in 2013. A year later, the Windsor, Ontario police force acquired a similar decommissioned LAV from the armed forces. Ottawa, Hamilton and Winnipeg police forces have also bought armoured vehicles. Sound cannons that cause permanent hearing loss were bought by the Toronto police before the G8 and G20 summits in 2010, by the Vancouver police before 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. So what is really needed now? Canada needs much more public oversight of the police services,” wrote Branka Marijan for Project Ploughshares, a peace organization, in 2016.

“The policing fraternity rarely transcends its narrow horizons, horizons that typically include a black and white view of the world. In the end, militarized displays of police presence will be sure to show up at demonstrations, rallies and protests, just as surely as the police officers themselves,” says Workman.

The civilian oversight body that regulates police forces is the New Brunswick Police Commission. Half of its six members, including the chair, are former police officers, and a fourth member is a corrections officer. Civilian oversight in Canada has long been resisted by police forces in other jurisdictions. There are no visible minorities or members of over-policed communities, such as Aboriginal people, represented on the Commission.

Workman is worried about how a militarized police force will be used to intimidate people and squash legitimate dissent.

“The perception of threat rises in accordance with the militarization of local law enforcement, and not the other way around, especially in a quiet community like Fredericton. But, broader national trends render this decision especially alarming. Across Canada, we see courageous Aboriginal, environmental and community protests against extreme energy investment, including pipeline construction, bitumen extraction and processing, and hydraulic fracturing. These protests have reached Fredericton and across New Brunswick.”

Workman adds that “it is acutely alarming that the LAV comes at a time when we learned that the RCMP has compiled an Aboriginal watch list (including 35 individuals from New Brunswick) in the aftermath of the Idle No More movement.”

The watch list combined with the LAV purchases suggests that police forces are moving towards control rather community-oriented policing.

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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 had many 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.

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

“From a societal benefit perspective, citizens with degrees are more civically engaged. They are less dependent on the health care system. They’re more environmentally conscious. They’re 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,” Etherington 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 addressed 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 help children and relatives get the education they need and develop their interests to the fullest. Vose mentioned how university professors in particular 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 has grown in the last two years. Vose encouraged 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 Passamaquoddy Bay finally came to an end in August 2016. Bob and Linda Godfrey, of Eastport, Maine, are founding members of Save Passamaquoddy Bay Three Nation Alliance. They plan to write a book about their struggle to stop three proposed LNG projects in the bay. With files from Barb Rayner for the Saint Croix Courier.



Community Calendar

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

Cinema Política believes in the power of art not only to entertain but to engage, inform, inspire and provoke social change. This winter, Cinema Política Fredericton will screen films on climate change, indigenous movements to protect the land from Amazonia to Athabasca, prisons and Syrian refugees on Wednesday nights at St. Thomas University, Brian Mulroney Hall, Room 103, at 6:00pm and 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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NB Media Co-op

180 St. John St., Fredericton, NB E3B 4A9

Email: info@nbmediacoop.org, Website: nbmediacoop.org

NB Media Co-op

@nbmediaco-op