“I have hope that I can count on us:” Speech at the Fredericton March Against Islamophobia and Deportations

By Gül Çalışkan

My name is Gül Çalışkan. I am an immigrant, I am a Muslim, I am Canadian, and Fredericton is where I call home, where my heart is.

Three feelings fill my heart today; a feeling of sorrow, a feeling of love, and a feeling of hope.

I am grieving for the victims of hate, racism and discrimination from the Quebec shooting and beyond. I am grieving for all the victims who have ever suffered from displacement and deportation. I am disheartened that the Quebec attack has reminded us of how persistent xenophobia and hate are in pockets of our nation’s cities. I am shaken that hate crimes have increased since the attack last weekend. In Montreal alone, 29 reports of hate crimes were received since the attack, as of last count on Feb. 1st, according to The Globe and Mail. I am disheartened that sentiments and acts of islamophobia, discrimination, and racism are ever more open and out there. This is my sorrow and worry.

But I also feel love. I am here as part of this circle of peace. Last week has also witnessed countless acts of reassurance for Muslim friends and neighbours all over Canada, and in our city. Canadians are sending a very strong message to haters, that we won’t allow their hatred get near to any Muslim, or any immigrant. On Feb. 3rd, at seven mosques in Toronto, people of all faiths formed human chains to protect worshippers during Friday prayers. On January 28th, people of my city, Fredericton, left a note at the door of our only mosque. It read, “Dear Muslim friends and neighbours, you are loved. You are respected. You belong. You are us, with a little red heart ending it. Now, Fredericton residents are raising money for the city’s mosque to have a safer and larger space. These acts of love, empathy and recognition send a very strong message to the haters. It is this love that fills my heart.

I have hope. That is the strongest feeling I have here today. I have hope that we are creating a very open space for dialogue in our city, for open discussion of racism, discrimination, and Islamophobia. I have hope that no one should or will remain in silence when they face any of these things. I have hope that I can count on us. All of our friends and neighbours, whether they are Muslims, refugees, or people of colour, will always know that we can build human shields. They know they will be surrounded by circles of peace. They will know that we will not tolerate hatred.

This is my message, I am heartbroken. Nonetheless, my hope for dialogue and solidarity is much bigger than my sadness. The love and peace demonstrated all week is bigger than hate. And it always will be.

Editor’s Note: This speech was delivered by Gül Çalışkan, a member of No One Is Illegal Fredericton, on February 4, 2017, at the Fredericton March Against Islamophobia and Deportations, attended by 200 people.

Hundreds gather for Fredericton women’s march

By SOPHIE M. LAVOIE

The Fredericton March of Women garnered a turnout of hundreds despite last-minute organization.

Close to 500 people gathered in front of City Hall in Fredericton on Saturday, Jan. 21, 2017 to show solidarity to the Women’s March organized in Washington, D.C., in reaction to the new U.S.’s President’s blatant disregard for women’s rights.

The enthusiastic crowd first heard from Fredericton March organizer Marsha Clark. The next speakers were Najat Abdou-McFarland, from the NB Coalition for Pay Equity, and Nelly Demerene, Executive Director of the francophone feminist group, Regroupement Féministe du Nouveau-Brunswick. RFNB’s delegation drove into Fredericton from Moncton especially for the event, armed with two colourful homemade banners and an large Acadian flag.

From the steps of City Hall, the Fredericton band Panda Bee Catastrophe delighted the crowd with a song from their debut EP, Consent is Sexy, released in the summer of 2016.

People of all ages, including entire families, held up creative hand-painted signs with feminist or other political slogans such as “Love Trumps Hate,” a refrain which developed from the recent U.S. election. There was also a smattering of pink “pussy” hats in the crowd knitted by participants especially for the march in reaction to Trump’s contempt for women.

The significant crowd marched from City Hall to the Legislature grounds, down Queen Street, garnering honks of support from passersby. At the NB Legislature, while it waited for all the participants to arrive, the crowd chanted slogans calling for the end of patriarchy, for solidarity, for the recognition of women’s rights, and other social justice slogans in French and English.

From the Legislature steps, Mary Miliken took the bullhorn as representative of Reproductive Justice New Brunswick. She spoke of her reasons for participating and some of the battles that remain to be fought in the province, including her organization’s most recent campaign to abolish regulation 84-20 of the Medical Services Payment Act, that limits reimbursements for abortions done in hospital settings, creating restrictions to abortion access to all in the province. Abortions are only performed in hospitals in two cities in the provinces, Moncton and Bathurst.

The march was part of a global movement of women making their voices heard all over the world. In the Atlantic region, supporters were present in Halifax (where over 1,000 people gathered), Charlottetown, and Sydney.

Sophie M. Lavoie is a board member of the UNB/STU University Women’s Centre, a member of Reproductive Justice NB and an editorial board member of the NB Media Co-op.

A crowd of about 200 people gathered at Fredericton City Hall to demand an end to Islamophobia and deportations and more humane refugee and immigration policies on a cold winter day on Feb. 4, 2017. They then marched through the streets of downtown Fredericton chanting, “No One Is Illegal,” and “No hate! No fear! Refugees are welcome here!”

By GÜL ÇALIŞKAN

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Coming soon to New Brunswick: corporate control of hospital services

By SUSAN O’DONNELL

Hospital workers, members of CUPE 1252, and supporters greeted Health Minister Victor Boudreau outside the Fredericton pre-budget consultation in late 2016. Photo from CUPE 1252.

Will a corporation care more about the quality of its hospital services or the profits it can make for its shareholders? New Brunswick residents will soon have an answer to that question. The provincial government is negotiating a multi-million dollar contract with Sodexo, an international corporation with operations in Canada. According to the proposed deal, Sodexo will take over the management of the food, cleaning and patient transportation services in New Brunswick hospitals.

Sodexo is a publicly traded corporation, primarily involved in providing services in the food, cleaning, and patient transportation industry. With over 425,000 employees in 80 countries, Sodexo is the 19th largest employer in the world.

The deal, which would see Sodexo manage hospital services in New Brunswick for the next three years, is currently under negotiation. The provincial government has not released details of the contract, but the deal would reportedly include a financial benefit for the province.

According to the government, the contract with Sodexo will result in savings for the province due to the corporation’s experience in managing hospital services. However, there are concerns among hospital workers and patients about the impact of corporate control on the quality of healthcare services.

Many hospital workers, who are members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), oppose the deal. They argue that corporate control will lead to cost-cutting measures and a reduction in the quality of services provided.

The hospital workers union has expressed concerns about the potential impact of Sodexo’s presence on patient care. They argue that the corporation’s focus on profits will lead to a reduction in the quality of services, and that the workers’ rights and well-being will be put at risk.

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) is a union representing workers in a variety of sectors, including healthcare. The union has a long history of advocating for workers’ rights and has played a significant role in the fight against corporate control in the healthcare sector.

Community Calendar

Fighting Fake News: Tips for Aspiring Truth Detectives

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau speaking at a Fredericton townhall session hosted by the Fredericton Chamber of Commerce and Fredericton/Oromocto MP Matt DeCourcey on Jan. 17, 2017. Photo by Lynaya Astephen.