Franklin Valenzuela, a Guatemalan youth activist, on the shores of Prince Edward Island on June 20, 2016. Photo by Lisa Rankin.

Topacio Vive! Guatemalan youth fight for the living and their dead

BY TRACY GLYNN

Topacio Reynoso Pacheco was 16 years old when she was fatally shot in an attack that also left her father, Alex, in a coma for seven months. The attack was linked to their community's resistance to Goldcorp. Angelica Choc, an opponent of the HudBay nickel mine, was also rejected by the Mexican authorities on multiple occasions.

As the mine developed, so did conflict and resistance from the indigenous Xinca and Ladino communities in the area. Some were in favour of the mine while others were opposed. Farmers became worried about water contamination and shortages. They grow corn, beans, onions, tomatoes and coffee there.

Results of a 2012 plebiscite on the mine in Mataquescuintla were a strong opposition, with 96% of the voters casting a ballot rejecting the mine. The Constitutional Court of Guatemala then landed another blow to the company and the government when, for the first time in Guatemala's history, the court said that the consultation and plebiscite results were binding and there was an obligation by the State to comply with the results.

Six municipalities surrounding the Escobal mine have also rejected the mine through referenda and opponents of the mine are getting elected including Roberto Pivaral, member of the Committee in Defense of Life and Peace who was an early victim of Tahoe's strategy to criminalize opponents. He won the mayoral race on a pro-referendum platform in San Rafael Las Flores.

For their opposition, residents of Mataquescuintla have endured a state of siege and have been targeted with violent repression, criminalization and stigmatization.

Valenzuela’s father, uncle and neighbours have been subject of bogus charges that were later dropped when it was too obvious there was no evidence. Their homes have been burned and ransacked by the authorities on multiple occasions.

Canadian mining companies in Guatemala have long enjoyed the support of corrupt politicians in Guatemala, including former President Otto Pérez Molina who was indicted on charges of illicit association, customs fraud and bribery. An international warrant has been issued for former Vice President Roxana Baldetti who granted the mine license to Tahoe Resources. He is facing charges of money laundering and conspiracy. Archibald, approved Tahoe’s exploitation license in 2013 despite 250 individual complaints concerning the project’s impact on water, health.

Valenzuela tells Canadian audiences that he has only shared part of the story of his community’s struggles against Canadian mining.

The youth organizer joins many other Guatemalan activists who have visited Fredericton and other communities across Canada in just over a decade. Cristiana Perez spoke of the criminalization that she has suffered for resisting the Goldcorp mine in San Marcos highlands last summer. Before Perez, Javier De Leon, a community organizer, and Juan Tena, a farmer from Sipakapa, spoke of their community’s resistance to Goldcorp. Angelica Choc has made several trips to Canada, including to Repton and El Pie de Job, site of a violent break up of a camp against shine gas in 2013, to share the story her of husband, Adolfo Ich, an opponent of the Hudbay nickel mine, was murdered by the company’s security guards.

The speaking tours have been organized by the Maritimes Guatemala Breaking the Silence Network. Breaking the Silence has been supporting communities in Guatemala affected by Canadian mining companies since 2004.

Imagining an urban Fredericton

BY MATTHEW HAYES

Now that the dust has settled on the recent municipal elections, and Fredericton has a new mayor, we can focus a bit on what future vision our city needs.

Mike O’Brien and his council have set about the task with a new project, Imagine Fredericton.

Imagining how our city is changing also requires reckoning with how the world is changing, and how the Alberta oil will have to stay in the ground for Canada to meet its climate change commitments, many of the workers who can currently rely on jobs in Alberta need new opportunities in new industries - and therefore, they also need education and training opportunities that our universities and community colleges can provide. We need a new urban vision, one that recognizes that urban areas are creative spaces that draw people to them. In an age of exploding real estate costs in global cities, small cities in New Brunswick can attract new industries if they can offer the type of urbanism that more and more people in Canada want to enjoy.

Matthew Hayes is a professor of sociology at St. Thomas University and a former mayoral candidate. His 2012 campaign focused on ideas for Fredericton’s future.

The launch of Imagine Fredericton drew approximately 150 people who were keen to share their ideas for Fredericton’s future. Photo by Tracy Glynn.
Topacio!: 
Lisa Rankin, a coordinator with Breaking the Silence, reminded the Fredericton audience that the violence of Guatemala’s 30 year old civil war did not really end but rather took on a different form and Canadian mining companies are implicated in that violence.

Since Guatemala’s invasion in 1960 when Mama Maquin was slain with 51 other Maya Q’eqchi’ peasants in the Panzós Square while rallying against a Canadian-owned nickel mine, the conflict has continued to be deplored on opponents against various forms of resource extraction, sometimes killing them. Revived efforts to mine nickel in eastern Guatemala were linked to rapes and murder committed in 2007, charges Maya Q’eqchi’ women and men are presently bringing to court in Canada in one of several historic lawsuits that involve a Canadian company going to trial for the actions of its subsidiary abroad.

The nature and extent of capitalist resource exploration and extraction seen today in Guatemala and other Latin American countries is referred to as extractivism and the authors argue that to move beyond capitalism, it requires a needs-based, democratic alternative.

Franklin Valenzuela and Jeremías Tecu (left to right) take part in a social media campaign that is collecting messages of support for the youth organization, JODVID, in Fredericton on June 19, 2016. Photo by Lisa Rankin.

Authors call for needs-based democratic alternatives to the capitalist state

BY BRUCE WARK

Two Canadian political science professors contend there is a desperate need to find alternatives to the capitalist economic system.

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In Brief

Covered Bridge Potato Chip workers win first contract.

Covered Bridge Potato Chips located in Youngsfield, New Brunswick won a first contract on May 24, ending a five-month strike and national boycott of the company’s chips. The workers have waited four years for a fair first contract. The three-year agreement includes seniority provisions, job protection language and wage and benefit gains. “This is a tremendous victory for the members, who were absolutely courageous and determined in their campaign for fairness,” says Dan Smith, president of UFCW Canada Local 1288P. “Through thick and thin and through one of the most frigid winters ever, they never lost faith and were ready to hold the line for as long as it took to get a fair first contract.”

NB to fund gender-confirming surgeries. The government of New Brunswick announced that they plan to implement Medicare coverage for gender-confirming surgeries and remove restrictions on changing identification documents on June 13. New Brunswick joins other provinces in Canada in eliminating coverage for this important surgery. In the announcement, TransAction NB, an advocacy group for trans health care, stated: “Being able to access gender-confirming surgery and appropriate identification documents will markedly improve the lives of NB’s trans residents for a number of reasons. To begin with, it’s a recognition of a marginalized minority group; we have a high likelihood of experiencing violence, abuse, and ignorance in our day-to-day lives, and we face high levels of discrimination that prevent us from accessing adequate housing, employment, education, healthcare, and social services.”

Thom Workman and Geoffrey McCormack, authors of The Servant State: Overseeing Capitalist Accumulation in Canada.

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Feminist Dance Party on the Patio

July 16 at 8 pm to 1 am, Grad House, 678 Windsor St., Fredericton. Join us for a dance party through and through with Katrinka. In case of rain, we'll be inside. Organized by members of Reproductive Justice NB. Admission by donation to cover event fees. Contact reproductivejustice@gn.com.