



# The Brief

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## Allies extend solidarity to Wolastoqiyik grandmothers opposing the Sisson Mine

By TRACY GLYNN



**Sister Maudilia López shares her struggle with Goldcorp in Guatemala with Lawrence Wuest from Stanley at the Wolastoqiyik Grandmothers' Camp on May 26.** Photo by Tracy Glynn.

In a moving show of solidarity, more than three dozen people from Fredericton visited the Wolastoqiyik grandmothers' camp in the woods near Napadogan on May 26.

Almost one year ago, the grandmothers established a permanent camp to defend their traditional hunting territory from the Sisson Mine project, which is proposed in the headwaters of the Nashwaak Watershed.

If built, HDI Northcliff's Sisson Mine project would be one of the largest open-pit tungsten and molybdenum mines in the world. Experts from MiningWatch Canada have condemned the project as economically unfeasible with significant negative long-term environmental impacts.

"I was so surprised to look up and see all the vehicles coming down the road to help with the garden and longhouse," said Andrea Polchies, one of the Wolastoqiyik grandmothers living at the camp.

The grandmothers have named the location of the camp, Macehcewik sipohsisol, which means "where the brooks begin" in the Wolastoq language. The camp is located where a huge tailings dam is proposed to contain the Sisson Mine's waste.

The caravan of farmers, professors, students, writers and retirees travelled to the camp to help construct a traditional longhouse at precisely the location of the proposed open-pit mine, plant a raised-bed vegetable garden, and donate food, supplies and money for the camp.

Sister Maudilia López, a Maya Mam Catholic nun resisting the Canadian mining company, Goldcorp, in San Miguel Ixtahuacán, Guatemala, was a visitor with the caravan to the camp. Goldcorp operated the Marlin gold mine in López's community for 12 years, from 2000 to 2012.

Sr. López shared her community's struggle with Goldcorp with the grandmothers and allies gathered in front of the solar-powered tiny home at the camp.

"I want indigenous people to fall in love with the Earth and their own roots, not just follow European and North American beliefs that have nothing to do with our culture," Sr. López told the *National Catholic Reporter* in 2016.

Sr. López has been working with activists in the United Church of Canada's Mining the Connections Working Group to get the church to stop investing its pension plan in Goldcorp.

Alan Hall, the United Church's staff person responsible for the pension board, told Sr. López in a meeting, days before at the United Church's Maritimes Conference in Sackville, that Goldcorp had resolved many of its problems with communities.

Sr. López challenged Hall's positive depiction of the company's actions by sharing the ongoing problems

caused by the Goldcorp mine in her community, after which she received a standing ovation from the conference participants. Hall said he would study the information that she shared.

On the matter of divestment from Goldcorp, Kathryn Anderson, a member of the United Church's Mining the Connections Working Group, says, "The church's Pension Board is in opposition to the will of the church, strongly expressed at its last General Council in 2015."

Sr. López is one of many Maya Mam people affected by Goldcorp's Marlin mine in Guatemala to visit Fredericton over the past decade.

In 2015, Crisanta Perez, a Mayan Mam grandmother, discussed her community's struggle against the Marlin mine on a panel about the criminalization of land defenders. Perez blamed the Marlin mine for shortages in water, cracks in homes, health problems and criminalization and violence against opponents.

Almost ten years before, in 2006, Juan Tema, a farmer from Sipakapa, spoke to an audience in Fredericton about the farmers' struggles against the Marlin mine.

In 2004 and 2005, Sipakapa farmers staged a 42-day blockade that stopped the mine's trucks from passing through their community. The blockade violently ended when more than 1,200 soldiers and 400 police officers fired shots at the unarmed protesters, killing Raul Castro Bocel, a farmer, and injuring many others.

Sr. López who is now dealing with the aftermath of the large-scale mining operation in her community was especially interested in learning how the Wolastoqiyik plan to stop the mine from starting operations.

Hart Perley, one of the Wolastoqiyik grandmothers, explained to Sr. López and the group gathered at the camp that she has written many letters, including to the Canadian Prime Minister, cabinet ministers responsible for indigenous affairs and the Queen of England to state her community's opposition to the Sisson Mine project.

In her letters, Perley cites the Peace and Friendship treaties that never surrendered any land in New Brunswick away from the indigenous people. She also references numerous legal conventions dealing with indigenous people and consent, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Federal Minister of Justice Jody Wilson-Raybould is the only Canadian official to have acknowledged Perley's correspondence.

"Hart, you are my hero. You are my hero for being out here, defending the land," Joan McFarland, a grandmother, economics professor at St. Thomas University and long-time solidarity activist with Guatemala, told Perley.

Tracy Glynn is a member of the Fredericton committee of the Maritimes-Guatemala Breaking the Silence Network.

## Renewable energy projects make sense both economically and environmentally

By DALLAS MCQUARRIE

While climate change makes the need to replace fossil fuels with alternative non-polluting sources of energy quite urgent, leadership in developing clean, renewable energy sources is not coming from the politicians. The versatility and value of renewable energy technologies is being demonstrated in everything from "do it yourself" projects to large and small commercial ventures.

For those who like the "do it yourself" approach, Bobby Pitre's homemade solar panel shows what can be done. Pitre lives in Collette, a rural community near Rogersville in Northumberland County.

A combination of "environmental considerations and rising heating costs" led Pitre to make a solar panel from pop cans to heat his garage. The garage, which Pitre also built, is 1,200 square feet, with a 12-foot high ceiling. Pitre's solar panel consists of "60 columns of pop cans, with each column 15 pop cans high." The solar panel is mounted on the south side of Pitre's garage.

As well as producing free heat in the fall, winter and spring, Pitre's solar heating panel is pollution free. Unlike shale gas and other fossil fuels, it doesn't release greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, contaminate water sources or destroy land with toxic by-products.

Each of the 900 pop cans used in Pitre's solar panel has its bottom removed and extra holes added to the top to allow the free passage of air through the cans. The pop cans are held together by a sealant, and painted a matte black to enable them to absorb more heat from the sun.

"Building a solar panel with 900 pop cans did take some time," Pitre said, but he notes that two smaller pop can solar arrays have already been built in the Collette area. As well, members of Our Environment, Our Choice, a Kent County environmental group, have traveled to Collette to learn about generating pollution-free heat from sunshine and pop cans.

"It's a great set up because the solar panel provides free heat whenever the sun is shining," Pitre said. "The disadvantage is that the heat is not regulated, so if it gets too hot, you have to open a window or provide a vent to the outside for the heated air."

"I wanted to heat my garage as cheaply as possible, and a pop can solar panel does that" at a small up-front cost. The initial cost is for a thermostat, fan and related switches that turn the unit on and off, and circulate the air. Once in place, Pitre said he uses "about half the electricity of a kitchen toaster" to run the fan and thermostat.

The fan pushes air from the garage into a duct along the bottom of Pitre's solar panel. As sunlight heats up the black pop cans, the heated air rises to the top of the array and into another duct that brings the heated air into the garage.

Pitre estimates his pop can solar panel saves him about \$100 a month when in use during the fall, winter and spring.



**Bobby Pitre from Collette built a solar heating panel from 900 pop cans to heat his 1,200 square foot garage for both economic and for environmental reasons.** Photo by Dallas McQuarrie.



# Union wins wage increase for rural postal workers, edging closer to pay equity

By SUSAN O'DONNELL



**Desmond Dowden, a Fredericton postal worker, holding a sign for pay equity while his union was locked out by Canada Post in 2011.** Photo by Tracy Glynn.

After a long struggle between Canada Post and its largest union, an arbitration ruling will mean a pay raise for rural postal workers across the country, including 360 workers in New Brunswick, mostly women. The arbitration decision in early June recognized that pay inequities exist between the Rural and Suburban Mail Carriers (RSMCs), two-thirds of whom are women, and their urban counterparts, mostly men.

The decision will affect more than 8,000 rural postal workers across Canada represented by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) at Canada Post. The Crown corporation posted a before-tax profit of \$74 million last year when it called the lower pay for RSMCs a “competitive advantage.”

Amy Anderson, president of the CUPW Acadie Bathurst local and a member of the national CUPW negotiating committee, has been an RSMC for more than 30 years. Anderson says that CUPW has always believed that pay equity was a legal obligation of Canada Post. The union “was determined to negotiate it into our collective agreement, so our members would not have to wait for 20 to 30 years for justice and no longer be treated as a competitive advantage by being a cheaper workforce for the Corporation.” In the last bargaining round for a new collective agreement, the union negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding to fast-track a pay equity study.

The completed study was reviewed by arbitrator Maureen Flynn. In her decision, Flynn confirmed that the work of the rural and urban workers is of equal value and there is a pay gap, and she gave the parties until the end of August to negotiate the terms to resolve the

inequity. The main items to be addressed include wages and benefits including disability, life insurance, post-retirement health and dental plans and other benefits. CUPW’s position is that the employees are entitled to the benefits but Canada Post wants cash payments instead.

Anderson has worked with other activists for many years to improve the working conditions and rights of RSMCs, including their battle to unionize and become employees of Canada Post in 2004. “Through the last 14 years, we have seen many improvements, but having our work recognized as being of equal value has always been the ultimate goal. Thanks to CUPW and our Pay Equity committee, we have finally achieved this,” Anderson said. “However, we realize that equity is not equality, and will be working diligently though the current negotiations to achieve full equality with our urban counterparts.”

CUPW has a long history of fighting for women’s rights since 1976 when the first CUPW local women’s committee was formed in Vancouver. In 1981, the year after their national convention held its first meeting on women’s issues, CUPW workers voted to strike for paid maternity leave. The strike galvanized feminists and allies across Canada and raised the bar for women’s rights at work. Today, according to CUPW, half of all collective agreements across Canada include paid maternity leave.

In a statement posted on its website, CUPW underscored its commitment to women’s rights, stating: “For all women working across the country, this result should help establish how a quick and effective pay equity process can be put in place. Many women have waited decades; justice delayed is justice denied.”

Frances Leblanc is the Chair of the New Brunswick Coalition for Pay Equity, which has been following the development of the CUPW case. “We are thrilled about this victory,” she said. Leblanc explained that uncovered and unwanted biases affect the value of female-dominated work, making it essential that proactive pay equity legislation exists both at the federal and the provincial level. “Proactive legislation means that all employers would have the obligation to evaluate female-dominated jobs and compare them with male-dominated ones in order to ensure equal pay for work of equal value.”

Currently, pay equity at the federal level is legislated through the Canadian Human Rights Act, which requires someone or a group to make a complaint before an investigation is launched. In contrast, as directed by their members, CUPW pro-actively negotiated pay equity at the bargaining table. At the same time, the federal government has promised to introduce progressive pay equity legislation by the end of 2018. This will require all federally-regulated employers to compare the value and wages of female-dominated and male-dominated jobs in their own workplace.

Federally-regulated employers are mostly in the sectors of telecommunications, banks, interprovincial transportation, federal government and federal Crown Corporations. All other employers fall under provincial jurisdiction. In New Brunswick, the 2009 Pay Equity Act covers only public sector workers employed by the provincial government, the school and hospital systems and provincial Crown Corporations.

The NB Coalition for Pay Equity is asking for the Act to be extended to the private sector. “This is an exciting time,” said Leblanc. “Provincially, in advance of the fall election, we are looking for support from all political parties to implement pay equity legislation for the private sector before 2020.”

*Susan O’Donnell is a member of the editorial board of the NB Media Co-op.*

## Community Calendar

To list your community event, email [info@nbmediacoop.org](mailto:info@nbmediacoop.org). For an updated listing of events, check [nbmediacoop.org](http://nbmediacoop.org).

**Masuma Khan: Building Solidarity and Resilience While Surrounded by Fragility.** Masuma Khan will share her experiences with racism and censorship as a student leader at Dalhousie University when she spoke in solidarity with indigenous people in 2017. Masuma Khan will be the NB Media Co-op’s keynote speaker at its ninth annual members’ meeting on Wed, Sept. 19 at 7:00pm at Tilley Hall, Room 102, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton. Contact: [info@nbmediacoop.org](mailto:info@nbmediacoop.org).

**I am Rohingya: A Genocide in Four Acts with director, Yusuf Zine.** Tues, Sept. 25 at 7:00pm at St. Thomas University, Fredericton (Room TBA). This powerful film chronicles the journey of 14 Rohingya refugee youth in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario, who take to the stage to re-enact their families’ harrowing experiences in Burma and beyond. Contact: [fredericton@cinemapolitica.org](mailto:fredericton@cinemapolitica.org).

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## Renewable energy makes sense

In the summer, the solar panel is covered by wood panels because energy from the sun is not needed.

“It’s not difficult to build and I’d be glad to tell anyone how it’s done,” Pitre said. “There are videos on YouTube that also describe how to build a solar panel from pop cans.”

Sunlight can also be converted to electricity, and that’s the path chosen by Frank Jopp on his dairy farm near Sussex in Kings County. Today the Jopp farm is also the site of New Brunswick’s first, and only, solar farm.

“I wanted to do something to reduce energy costs in our dairy barn because, like everything else, the price of electricity doesn’t go down, but goes steadily up over time,” Jopp said. “It’s become environmentally necessary to use clean energy.”

“We’re nearing completion of an expansion that will increase the electricity we produce from 75 to 135 kilowatts,” Jopp stated. That’s the amount of electricity used by about eight to ten homes in a day in New Brunswick.

Jopp’s solar array consists of 25 poles with 16 solar panels mounted on each pole. The power from the 400 solar panels produced is sold to NB Power, which then sells Jopp back the electricity for his dairy operation.

Jopp’s dairy farm demonstrates that solar power is both economically viable and environmentally responsible. It also provides an actual working model of what individual farmers can do to lock in low energy prices for years to come using a clean energy source that does not jeopardize the environment for future generations.

Oil and gas companies cost Canadian taxpayers \$3.3 billion a year in government grants, subsidies and other forms of corporate welfare. Private citizens like Jopp and Pitre get no government help whatsoever for developing and using clean, renewable sources of energy that do not contribute to climate change.

Mark McAloon is the President and co-owner of NexGen, an energy company in Quispamsis that installed Jopp’s solar array.

“A solar array can produce electricity for about seven cents a kilowatt hour, while residential customers in New Brunswick pay about eleven cents per kilowatt hour for electricity,” McAloon said. “Micro-solar farms that convert sunlight to electricity are not only possible, but economically viable.”

Jopp’s solar panel will still be producing electricity for seven cents a kilowatt hour in 2040, while NB Power’s price over the next 20 years could increase from the current 11 cents per kilowatt hour to 20 cents a kilowatt hour.

“Once a solar array is in place, the cost of producing electricity from that array is ‘locked in and won’t increase for the life span of the panel, which is 25 years,” McAloon said. “Renewable energy is an exciting field and, ultimately, it does come down to numbers and cost savings.”

“Our primary focus right now is the agriculture industry because farmers, being big energy users, have a better understanding of the value of being able to lock in energy costs for 25 years.” Private residences are more of a “hard sell” because homeowners don’t fully understand the long-term economic payback of locking in low energy prices, according to McAloon.

McAloon noted that having a clean, renewable energy source with long-term low prices “adds to the value of a home.” Homeowners who want to learn about potential energy cost savings should first have an energy audit done by NB Power, and that costs \$99 (plus tax), he added.

While using these energy sources is the smart thing to do both economically and environmentally, work to educate the homeowners and make people aware of the possibilities is needed.

McAloon pointed out that California now requires solar panels on all new construction, and that requirement is also common in many places in Europe. Some populations are much more educated about both the need for, and the economic benefits of, converting to clean and sustainable energy such as wind or solar.

While governments in Canada continue pumping tax dollars into the oil and gas industry, the Tobique First Nation is establishing a commercial wind farm. Tobique is one of six Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) reserves in New Brunswick, and construction on its wind farm will begin next spring.

Amy Pellerin is with Natural Forces Wind Inc. (NFW), the company that will construct the Tobique wind farm. “When operating at full capacity, the Tobique project will produce enough electricity to provide power for 4,500 homes,” Pellerin confirmed. NFW works with independent power producers to increase the number of renewable energy projects.

As with the Jopp dairy farm, the Tobique First Nation will sell the power it produces to NB Power. At full capacity, the power produced by the wind farm will displace 70,000 tons of carbon dioxide a year that would otherwise be added to the atmosphere.

Pellerin revealed that there are several wind farm projects on the go in the Maritimes, including one being planned for the Richibucto area. Natural Forces Wind also has a project with 13 First Nation Bands in Nova Scotia. “First Nations have a greater sense of urgency about helping to reduce [greenhouse gas] emissions,” she said.

It’s tragic that governments in Canada lack the vision of the Tobique First Nation, and people like Jopp, Pitre and others who recognize that the time for sustainable energy has come.

*Dallas McQuarrie writes on the environment for the NB Media Co-op from Mi’kmaq territory at St. Ignace.*

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