



The Brief

Vol. 7 No. 9

A publication of the NB Media Co-op

June 2016

nbmediacoop.org

Irving paper defends Irving tax deal

By JEAN-CLAUDE BASQUE



Saint John's poverty rate (after tax) was 18.8 per cent in 2012, higher than the provincial average of 14.3 per cent and the national average of 13.5 per cent. Lone-income families and children suffer more from poverty in Saint John. Saint John has one of the highest child poverty rates in Canada at 29.3 per cent. Photo by Bonnie Glynn.

Saint John City Council is trying to renegotiate a 25-year agreement it made with Irving in 2005 that gave the company an annual property tax break on its Canaport Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) facility. Irving has been paying \$500,000 each year for the last 11 years when it should have been paying over \$8 million per year to the city.

The editor of the *Telegraph-Journal*, a Irving-owned newspaper, criticized the Saint John councilors who voted at council meeting on May 2 to end the tax deal in the newspaper's editorial column the next day.

The editor acknowledges that the deal had its flaws but argues that the city benefited from the tax break since the company has created about 100 jobs and donates hundreds of thousands of dollars to the hospital and community organizations.

The editor seems to forget that these charitable donations are possible precisely because Irving saves millions of dollars each year on the backs of taxpayers of Saint John.

Jean-Claude Basque is a long-time anti-poverty activist and organizer with the NB Common Front for Social Justice. The Common Front, one of New Brunswick's largest organizations, with close to 75,000 group and individual members, works on eradicating poverty.

First you get housing

By NORM SKELTON

You see them on the street; maybe in the park. You might drop a coin or two into a paper cup or a hat. You might say "Hi." You might pretend they are not there. You might blame them for their circumstance. You might resent them.

Maybe you care; maybe you don't. You may even believe that you are better than they are. After all, you have a home. Those few homeless that you see are the obvious tip of an unacceptable iceberg.

According to Faith McFarland, homelessness is far more pervasive in New Brunswick than the public often realizes. Yet its persistence and the lack of programmes to assist the homeless also comes with a cost.

"Homelessness not only comes at a great moral cost to a society but also great financial cost," she said. "The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness asks, 'can we save money by doing the right thing' and learned that the answer is yes."

Homelessness is expensive. That one homeless person that you see? If we provided that one person with housing and the supports needed to maintain it, we start saving money, lots of money.

This is why a growing number of activists are calling for the adoption of a Housing First policy.

According to the Canada-wide "At Home" study, an investment of \$10.00 in Housing First services saved \$21.72 in emergency and standard support services. In Fredericton, one Housing First project with twelve participants saw a positive cost differential of over \$200,000 in its inaugural year over the standard emergency treatment of shelters, transition houses, police interaction, and hospital and institutional measures.

Housing First projects recognize that the standard measures of treatment are an expense born by both taxpayers and charitable organizations without creating the cost benefits that result from the permanent housing that accrues from the Housing First approach. Housing

First research from across the country regularly shows savings of \$50-100,000 per person per year.

The numbers of homeless and the costs of keeping people homeless are disturbing. A 2016 study conducted in Fredericton as part of the 20,000 Homes Campaign found 50 absolutely homeless people in the capital city in just one night. The Moncton study found 77; St. John, 60; Bathurst, 12. Absolute homeless refers to people who are unsheltered/sleeping outdoors or emergency sheltered, in shelter system.

The 199 people found homeless in four cities in New Brunswick in one night in late February 2016 are not the only people who face homelessness. The 2012 Homeless Hub's Community Profile on Fredericton estimated that there were 1,300 New Brunswick citizens living in hidden homelessness and that over 9,500 households were at risk of homelessness, but there is reason to hope. In fact, there is a means to ending our current homelessness and to preventing future homelessness.

Working with the principles of Housing First, New Brunswick can end chronic/episodic homelessness. We can ensure that those facing homelessness in the future will not need to access costly emergency shelters and services for more than ten days. We can ensure that the homeless receive the services needed to keep them off the street, give the hidden homeless safe and affordable shelter, and reduce the number of households at risk of losing their homes.

Housing First has a proven success record in both Canada and the United States and, for our purposes, has shown to be a success here in New Brunswick. This community-based consumer-driven success has benefits that are not only measured in human savings but in economic costs.

Once a person is identified, the implementation of Housing First begins with quickly providing suitable, affordable housing without the extant restrictions (drug-free, sober, employed) and then providing any services required to keep the participants housed. Housing First



A panhandler in downtown Fredericton. Still from a video produced for the Community Action Group on the Homelessness. Video by Ian Miller.

works to locate suitable housing, and works with the landlord to build mutually beneficial relationships between the participant and the landlord. The participant must comply with a standard Landlord/Tenant Agreement and also agree to regular visits by service providers. Finally, the participants are treated as individuals and receive the targeted services and supports necessary to maintain their housing on a permanent basis.

Housing First recognizes that existing social services are more effective in stabilizing individuals and families when they are in their own homes. The homeless cannot recover from addictions, chronic health physical issues or mental health challenges while living on the street.

In Fredericton, the John Howard Society's Main Street Project reports that, for its twelve residents, their Housing First placements showed a cost difference of \$202,975.00 in its inaugural year. This amounts to a tax/charitable donation savings of over \$16,000 for each individual. Some of the savings were shown through: a 89% reduction in emergency department, saving \$3,000; a 43% reduction in justice system contacts, saving \$87,000; and a 84% reduction in hospitalization, saving \$119,000.

It makes no economic sense for us to leave people homeless. The cost of homelessness is too high.

Norm Skelton is a volunteer with Fredericton's Community Action Group on Homelessness and an At-Large Member of Canada Without Poverty's Board of Directors.

Elsipogtog to launch Aboriginal title claim to protect ancestral lands

By DALLAS McQUARRIE



Elsipogtog Band Chief Arren Sock, shown here at a protest camp against shale gas in Rexton, formally announcing his Band’s historic decision to resume control of its ancestral lands on Oct. 1, 2013. Just over two weeks later, the RCMP stormed the camp. A court action asserting Aboriginal title is imminent. Photo by Dallas McQuarrie.

Elsipogtog First Nation is about to launch court action asserting the reality of its legal title to its ancestral lands.

Band lawyer Bruce McIvor was in Elsipogtog on April 21 to complete preparations for an Aboriginal title claim. He promises that the claim will be made soon.

McIvor told an evening meeting in Elsipogtog, that ultimately the claim is about making it possible for the Mi’kmaq to survive as a distinct people into the future. He points out that the forests, waterways and plants and animals their ancestral lands provide are indispensable for the Mi’kmaq’s survival as a people.

That survival is currently threatened by clearcutting the forest in what one woman at the meeting called a “corporate feeding frenzy.” Clearcutting and the subsequent spraying of glyphosate, a chemical identified as a likely carcinogen, to prevent natural regrowth is being linked to the collapse in provincial deer populations. Many other species of plants and animals are threatened with local extinction by clearcutting.

The sense of urgency about stopping the forest from being wiped out has been heightened by the Gallant government’s refusal to respond to repeated requests by the Mi’kmaq to begin consultations on a number of issues. Like the Alward government before it that attempted to force shale gas on communities like Elsipogtog without consultation, the Gallant government is refusing to consult with the Mi’kmaq, including on the apparent drive to clearcut as much forest as possible before the Mi’kmaq can get to court.

Kopit Lodge spokesperson Ken Francis told the Elsipogtog meeting that since being elected, the Gallant government has been refusing requests to consult on a range of issues affecting the Mi’kmaq and their land. Kopit Lodge represents the Elsipogtog Band in matters dealing with resource extraction.

McIvor cautioned the meeting that the Aboriginal title claim “is not a silver bullet” that will immediately end all threats to the Mi’kmaq’s ancestral lands. Rather, he described the claim as a “strategy to force the provincial government to seriously engage” with Aboriginal people and begin respecting their rights.

“There’s no better way to get someone’s attention than with a lawsuit,” McIvor said. He noted that once an Aboriginal title claim is in place, governments and corporations have to start taking Aboriginal concerns seriously because the liability involved in continuing to ride roughshod over Aboriginal rights becomes too great.

The Mi’kmaq case will be strengthened by a 2014 Supreme Court of Canada ruling that, as McIvor noted in his 2014 publication, First Peoples Law, “regular use of definite tracts of land on a territorial basis for hunting, fishing and otherwise exploiting resources is sufficient to establish Aboriginal title.” That case, Tsilhqot’in vs. British Columbia, means “when Aboriginal title is established ... the Crown must either obtain the consent of Indigenous peoples to use Aboriginal title lands or meet the legal requirement for justifying an infringement.”

As with the Tsilhqot’in in British Columbia, so-called “Crown lands” in New Brunswick were never ceded by treaty or sold, and so remain Aboriginal land.

McIvor also recounted a case in British Columbia that saw the residents of a single industry town siding with Indigenous people, and against their employer, to protect and preserve a river and its fish stocks. The same parallels exist in New Brunswick where support among non-Indigenous people for the efforts of Indigenous peoples to protect the province’s natural heritage is strong and growing.

Dallas McQuarrie is a retired journalist and writes for the NB Media Co-op in Kent County.

In Brief



Mayworks Fredericton celebrates working class and art. More than a dozen artists came together, April 29 to May 7, for the second annual Mayworks Fredericton Festival of Working People and the Arts organized by the Fredericton & District Labour Council (FDLC). “The purpose of Mayworks Fredericton is to bring workers, artists and the general public together to celebrate justice and diversity and recognize the history and struggle of working people,” says FDLC President Alex Bailey. Jeff Bate-Boerop returned as Karl Marx in the Howard Zinn play, *Marx in Soho*. The Filipino-Canadian CommUNITY Association of NB organized a dance and forum about migrant worker struggles in New Brunswick. A Nepali food workshop discussed food and politics. Geoffrey McCormack and Thom Workman spoke to a full room at Conserver House on May Day about their book, *The Servant State: Overseeing Capital Accumulation in Canada*. The talk included a thoughtful assessment of the political left in Canada and a discussion of statistics of how Canada and New Brunswick fared following the latest economic crisis. Events also included the launch of the *Along the Pipeline* exhibition with faces and voices from along the proposed Energy East pipeline route, a film

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screening of *Suffragette* about the early feminist movement, an open mic night in tribute of labour organizer Joe Hill, a concert for kids with local musician Kelly Waterhouse and a powerful political spoken word performance by El Jones.

Mi’kmaq Chiefs sue province over forestry deal. Mi’kmaq First Nations Chiefs launched a lawsuit against the New Brunswick government over the 2014 Crown Forest Management Strategy on May 12. The statement of claim argues that the forest strategy was implemented without prior consultation with First Nations and is clear violation of the centuries old Peace and Friendship Treaties. The Mi’kmaq First Nations Chiefs are concerned that the forestry strategy will significantly, permanently and negatively impact wildlife and the health of New Brunswick’s forest while also harming Mi’kmaq rights to hunt, fish and gather in the forest. The Alward government in New Brunswick released the controversial Crown Lands Forest Management Strategy in 2014. First Nations, conservationists, scientists, economists, hunters and other forest users, retired civil servants and former government Ministers spoke out against the plan, which allowed a 20% increase in the annual allowable cut of softwood from New Brunswick’s forest. The increase in wood supply for industry will come from lands set aside for conservation, namely old forest, wildlife habitat zones and river buffers. The plan will also increase the allowable size of clearcuts from 75 hectares to 100 hectares. “The Mi’kmaq First Nations’ legal challenge gives us reason to be hopeful that the forestry strategy will be stopped and new, more wise legislation will be created that upholds Aboriginal rights and treaties and ensures the protection of our forest for the future,” said Lois Corbett of the Conservation Council of New Brunswick in a media release in support of the lawsuit.



Record number of petition signatures against spraying the forest. People from across New Brunswick attended a rally against herbicide spraying of the forest at the New Brunswick Legislature on May 18. Stop Spraying in NB presented MLA David Coon (pictured here) and MLA Gilles LePage with 13,000 signatures to a petition that calls for a ban on herbicide spraying in the public forest. The petition argues that the spraying affects wildlife and health and alternatives exist that would create more jobs in the forest. This was the fifth petition to be presented in the Legislative Assembly against spraying the forest in just over a decade. Photograph by Nick Hawkins Photography.

Four men arrested over murder of Berta Cáceres. Four men have been arrested in connection with the murder of the Honduran indigenous activist Berta Cáceres. Two of those arrested are linked to the company building a hydroelectric dam that Cáceres campaigned against. Cáceres, who last year won the Goldman Environmental Prize for her work opposing the Agua Zarca dam on the Gualcarque River, had previously reported both men to authorities for making threats against her life. Cáceres’ mother has stated publicly that the Honduran state backed by the U.S. government murdered her daughter. Canada and the U.S. supported the regime change in Honduras in 2009. The post-coup government has been more friendly to foreign investment and more deadly for activists. An estimated 109 opponents of dams, mining, logging and agriculture projects were murdered in Honduras in the five years following the coup, between 2010 and 2015, according to Global Witness.

Community Calendar

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

- Filipino Cultural Gala Night.** A night of fun, food and fashion. With the Filipino-Canadian CommUNITY of NB (FCNB) Cultural Dancers. June 18 at 5:00pm. Willie O’Ree Place, 605 Cliffe St., Fredericton. Tickets: \$15/person, \$5/child (under 12), \$30/family of four (2 adults, 2 children).



Not an Irving paper.



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