



The Brief

Vol. 7 No. 6

A publication of the NB Media Co-op

March 2016

nbmediacoop.org

“All workers deserve a rest:” Migrant workers organizing in the Maritimes

By TRACY GLYNN and ASAF RASHID



Over 75 Filipino migrant workers, labour union representatives and community activists gathered at the Equal in Rights, Equal in Dignity: Migrant Workers Rights Forum in Fredericton on Feb. 13. The migrant workers formed a chapter of Migrante to support migrant workers’ rights in the Maritimes.

Photo by Alfredo Baharona.

Fredericton - Permanent residency, open work permits and access to essential services like health care were demands voiced by more than 75 Filipino migrant workers, labour union representatives and community activists gathered at the Equal in Rights, Equal in Dignity: Migrant Workers Rights Forum in Fredericton on Feb. 13.

“It’s heavy on our hearts. Some of the workers have not told their families that their work permits are expiring and that they may be going home. They don’t want them to worry,” said Alma Damasco, a worker in the Shediac Lobster Shop and organizer with the newly-formed chapter of Migrante in New Brunswick.

Damasco from the Philippines got her permanent residency status last year but is committed to organizing for the rights of migrant workers in the Maritimes.

“I cannot bear the burden of seeing my friends leave when they have worked so hard here for years,” said Damasco.

The Shediac Lobster Shop was able to give Damasco and her co-workers a full-time contract so they were able to access the Provincial Nominees Program that, despite its problems, is seen as one of the only paths to permanent residency status.

Damasco worries about her friends with the establishment of the 30% cap by the former Harper government that stipulates that when employment falls below 6% in a region, an employer must only employ a 30% migrant workforce.

“Many of us who came here in 2011 were not able to stay because of the cap,” said Damasco. She noted, her voice breaking, that requirements to stay involve passing an English test and many of her friends have not passed or are too scared to take. “We don’t what’s going to happen them,” said Damasco.

One fish plant worker at the forum remarked, “if only the lobsters could talk,” expressing a desire to learn English but a lack of time and opportunity to learn the language.

Many workers said they have to wait six months for a Medicare card and are paying into Employment Insurance and Canadian Pension Plan even though they are not able to access those benefits.

“Some of the Canadians who are working with us are so welcoming but some of them think that we are taking their jobs. But we want them to understand that we just came here to work,” said Damasco.

“Migration is a very human story, but, the welcome is often conditional and we hold the power to accept or decline and leave out who we consider undeserving, sometimes to die,” said Jennifer Henry, Executive Director of KAIROS, an organization that brings together churches on social justice initiatives. KAIROS along with the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), Migrante Canada and the Canadian Labour Congress organized the forum.

“We become overly focused on controlling colonial borders. We are being faithful when we seek better paths to permanent residency, open work permits, access to community services and support, and ratification of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers and Their Families,” said Henry.

The number of undocumented workers in Canada are on the rise due to to ‘4 and 4 rule’, according to Jesson Reyes, Migrante Canada’s regional coordinator.

As of April 1, 2015, temporary foreign workers in low-waged occupations in Canada who had four-year work permits were no longer able to renew those permits. They are now forced to leave the country and wait four years before returning to work in Canada. Migrante Canada wants migrant workers to have landed permanent residence status upon arrival.

“We only have this ‘4 and 4’ rule in Canada because the government wants to be sure that there is always a fresh batch of

workers who are vulnerable,” said Reyes.

There are approximately 250,000,000 global migrants, according to 2015 statistics from the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Many migrants are forced from their homes in a struggle for survival, to escape war and find work. Migration experiences are very different for people depending on where they are from and their class backgrounds.

“When people from the global north retire in the Philippines, the red carpet is given to them. It’s seen as an economic opportunity for the local government. It is a different story when we want to bring our parents into Canada. It’s worth noting, who’s allowed to move when we consider global labour migration,” said Reyes.

“Migration is an industry. Migrant workers from the Philippines provide remittances back to their home governments. In 2015, the total remittances by Filipino workers was 27.1 billion. We also send money back home through our relatives. Thirteen percent of the Philippines’ GDP comes from these remittances,” said Reyes.

Josie Baker who works on migrant justice for the Cooper Institute, a social justice organization in Charlottetown, PEI, made connections between Atlantic Canadians working in the Alberta tar sands and migrant workers in our region from the Philippines and other countries.

“Rural poverty in Atlantic Canada and the employer-tied work permits of the temporary foreign worker program both serve to create flexible and disposable labour for free market capitalism. An equal and just society must provide migrant workers with permanent residence upon arrival in Canada and open work permits. The temporary work permit ties them to one employer. Open work permits ensure that no worker is tied to an abusive employer,” said Baker.

When describing what work conditions and relations are like in the Maritime fish plants, Damasco said, “We take over the shifts from the local workers at night. Many of the locals are 50 or 60 years old. They deserve a rest.” In response, Kelti Cameron, CUPE Global Justice Officer, said, “All workers deserve a rest.” Damasco described that shifts involve standing in the cold for 12 to 16 hours.

Recruitment agencies take advantage of migrant workers, according to Baker. “Recruitment agencies profit from the vulnerability of migrant workers. Although migrant workers are never supposed to have to pay a recruitment company to have to get a job, most workers arrive already in debt. Often, recruitment agencies will retain some level of control over workers while they are in Canada. Many agents charge legal or quasi-legal fees to allow a worker to keep a job they already have, or to ferry a worker from one province to another,” said Baker.

The stories of workers separated from their children, partners and families for years at a time hit Patrick Colford, NB Federation of Labour President and father of a young child, hard. He got emotional when offering solidarity to the workers, telling them that he admired their strength.

Tracy Glynn is an organizer with Refugees Welcome Fredericton and the Atlantic Regional Solidarity Network. Asaf Rashid is a law student at the University of New Brunswick and an organizer with Refugees Welcome Fredericton.

Inequality in abortion care in New Brunswick highlighted at pro-choice panel

By CHRISTOPHER PEARSON

Fredericton – “One law exists for people of means, and one law exists for poor people,” said Valerie Edelman, Manager of Clinic 554, on the topic of abortion care in the province of New Brunswick at a pro-choice panel on Feb. 4th at the University of Brunswick’s law school in Fredericton.

Allison Webster with Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada provided an update on where people can go to get a Medicare-funded abortion in the province; the Bathurst and two Moncton hospitals. Abortion services can also be accessed at Clinic 554 in Fredericton, but patients must pay approximately \$700 for the procedure.

Webster argued that the lack of regional access and access to Medicare-funded abortions in clinics was a concern for potential patients because of the problems it can present, such as loss of work time, finding childcare and physical risks.

The risk of complications during an abortion increase by 20% each week. This is particularly concerning due to the constraints many patients have to endure; for example, they must have two appointments including a consult and ultrasound before their abortion.

Webster asserted that private clinics are a more therapeutic environment for the patient because the staff is more welcoming, which prevents issues that may occur in a hospital, such as shaming from pro-life staff. She also claimed that patients have been blacklisted at hospitals for having more than one abortion.

Furthermore, Webster stated that potential patients have been given misinformation about the abortion age in New Brunswick. Webster stressed there is a need for more private clinic funding stating that abortion costs can reach as high as \$2000 for those without a Medicare card. She maintained that while hospital care is important, “it is just not enough.”

Jula Hughes, a UNB law professor, stated that provinces cannot regulate abortion services on moral grounds. She claimed that New Brunswick is trying to recriminalize abortion through backdoor policy and that this demonstrates a lack of respect for the Supreme Court of Canada’s decision, R. v. Morgentaler, which effectively allowed Dr. Morgentaler to perform legally Medicare-funded abortions in his clinics.

Hughes referred to changes to the Medical Services Payment Act, known in pro-choice circles as the McKenna amendments, brought in by then-New Brunswick Premier Frank McKenna in 1989.

McKenna said at the time, “If Mr. Morgentaler tries to open a clinic in the province of New Brunswick, he’s going to get the fight of his life.”



MLA Denis Landry speaking with reproductive health care advocates on Dec. 1st outside the NB Legislature. Photo by Kelly Baker Photography.

(continued page 2)

NATO with Canada’s support is pushing back refugee boats : Inequality in abortion care in New Brunswick

By ASAF RASHID

On February 11, 2016, Canada sent HMCS Fredericton as part of a three ship squad to the Aegean Sea. The objective of the mission has been described as to “help end the deadly smuggling of migrants between Turkey and Greece.”

Canadian and other NATO country efforts to stop “human smuggling” across the Aegean Sea traps refugees where their lives are in danger. According to the International Organization for Migration, over 409 refugees have died already in 2016 in trying to cross from Turkey to Greece in their attempted journeys to Europe.

Refugees make their perilous voyages by sea because their lives are in greater danger at their points of origin. They are fleeing for their lives. Rather than assisting them in their efforts to find safety, NATO’s mission will force refugees to make the journeys more complex and dangerous. They will still try to find a way.

As explained by Aurelie Ponthieu, humanitarian adviser for Doctors without Borders, “NATO’s involvement in the ‘surveillance of illegal crossings’ is dangerously short-sighted. People will continue to risk their lives in search of safety and protection, no matter the obstacles that the EU — and now the leaders of the NATO alliance — put in their way.”

What is human smuggling?

“Human smuggling” is generally a misleading term. It conjures the idea of refugees being exploited by others who are in some way coercing them into illegal journeys. Actually, human smuggling refers to every situation where refugees and migrants obtain the services of others to transport them illegally to their desired destination, no matter how desperate the journey, no matter what the price. Any time someone voluntarily makes a journey from one country to another, pays for it, and does not obtain legal approval for entry to their destination, they are being smuggled.

Quite often, refugees and migrants are themselves involved in administering these journeys. In other words, refugees are frequently their own “smugglers.”

A term often used interchangeably – and irresponsibly – with smuggling is “trafficking.” This term refers to the situation where people are involuntarily being moved.

The NATO anti-smuggling mission and its contradictions

Jens Stoltenberg, NATO secretary-general, explained that the anti-smuggling operation’s purpose as, “helping Greece, Turkey and the European Union with stemming the flow of migrants and refugees and coping with a very demanding situation.”

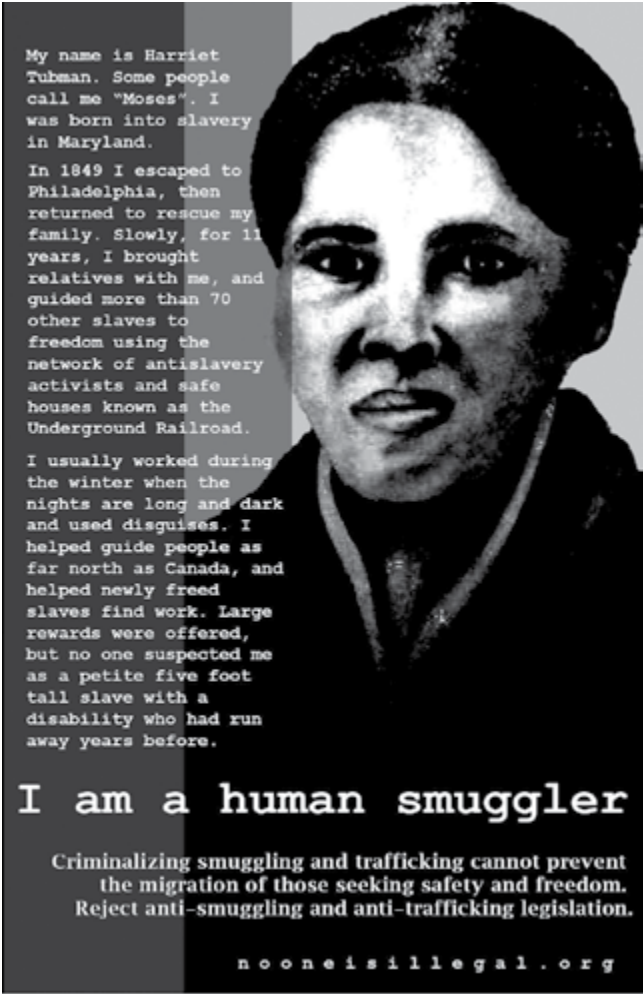
Stoltenberg gives misleading and contradictory messages. In the same media report, he makes the statement, “NATO will contribute critical information and surveillance to help counter human trafficking and criminal networks.”

The report, like many others on this subject, attempts to associate the human struggle of people taking matters into their own hands to find safety on the one hand, with criminal activity, and possible slavery, on the other. This is no slip of the tongue, but a deliberate effort to negatively colour the journeys of people fleeing for their lives in order to validate tighter immigration controls.

NATO with Canada's support is pushing back refugee boats

Stoltenberg told the media that, “This is not about stopping or pushing back refugee boats.” This statement is completely absurd. That is precisely the mission’s overall objective.

Asaf Rashid is an organizer with Refugees Welcome Fredericton.



In Brief

NB Power responds to abuses at Colombian coal mine. Supporting a request from Colombian union leader Francisco Ramirez Cuellar and solidarity groups in the Maritimes, NB Power President/CEO Gaetan Thomas wrote a letter to El Cerrejón Coal Company CEO Roberto Junguito in February acknowledging reports of abuses at the coal mine, owned by multinationals BHP Billiton, Anglo American and Glencore. The letter, copied to Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos, asks that all parties respect and uphold internationally recognized labour norms and human rights and the collective rights of affected communities to collective negotiation, collective relocation and reparations. Problems at the mine continued to surface in February. A petition has been launched to get water for people from the Tamaquito community that was displaced for the world’s largest open-pit coal mine. The company had promised to secure a water source for the community but so far has not. Also, members of three communities displaced for the mine are returning to their old lands because they say they are fed up with the way that the company is acting in negotiations with them. NB Power imports coal from the Cerrejón coal mine that is linked to the murders of union and community leaders and violent forced displacements of communities. NB Power has been buying 500,000 tonnes of coal from the Cerrejón coal mine every year since the mid-1990s. The coal is burned at the Belledune Generating Station in northern New Brunswick. Colombia has the highest rate of assassinations of unionists in the world. About 3,000 union organizers have been murdered in the country in the past 25 years. The mine workers and the company are currently negotiating a new collective agreement and a strike is on the table.

Wolastoq leaders oppose Energy East. Wolastoq leaders sent a defiant message against the Energy East pipeline, which would cut across their traditional territory, on Feb. 8 in Fredericton. If completed, the pipeline will carry diluted bitumen from the Alberta tar sands to the port of Saint John. The pipeline will cross hundreds of watercourses in New Brunswick and Wolastoq territory. The leaders say that the consequences of a spill into the freshwater system are so potentially serious that the pipeline must not be built. They also oppose it because of the climate change consequences of fossil fuel use and say that we should be ending our use of petroleum and not building new petroleum infrastructure such as pipelines.

J.D. Irving presents plan to convert NB’s Crown land to their freehold. Through a sweep of provincial archives, the Halifax Media Co-op and the NB Media Co-op obtained a slideshow presentation created by J.D. Irving (JDI), dated Jan. 24, 2012, that contains calculations related to a projected scenario where all Crown land in New Brunswick is managed as a JDI freehold by the year 2050. According to JDI’s calculations, nearly all economic indicators, including direct employment, indirect employment, royalties and tax revenues would nearly double – if only the province would allow Crown land to be managed as a JDI freehold.

Community Calendar

Seeds of Change. Mon, March 14 at 7:00pm at the Fredericton Playhouse. The controversial film examines the controversy surrounding the use of genetically modified (GM) crops across the Canadian prairies. Free admission. Presented by The Playhouse and Cinema Politica. Contact: fredericton@cinemapolitica.org.

SEEDS. Sat, March 19 at 7:30pm at the Fredericton Playhouse. An award-winning play that tells the story of the four-year legal battle between a Saskatchewan farmer and Monsanto. SEEDS is a suspenseful tale of epic legal conflicts, scientific showdowns about genetically modified

Regulation 84-20, Schedule 2 (a.1) of the Medical Services Payment Act dictated that two doctors approve that an abortion is “medically required,” and that the procedure must be performed in a hospital by a specialist in the field of obstetrics and gynecology. Brian Gallant’s newly elected government dropped this requirement in November 2014.

A second regulatory barrier to abortion access that has yet to be repealed and is the subject of a petition campaign by Reproductive Justice NB is Section 2.01(b) of the Act that prohibits public funding of otherwise “entitled services” (such as abortions) in private facilities, if such services are offered in public institutions such as hospitals.

Dr. Morgentaler opened an abortion clinic in Fredericton in 1993, which at the time of its closure in July 2014 was performing 60% of abortions in the province. Up until his death in 2013, Dr. Morgentaler was personally subsidizing the abortions of women who could not afford them. After his death, the Morgentaler Foundation made the difficult decision to close the clinic for financial reasons.

A group of Fredericton-based activists quickly mobilized to save the clinic and to connect the struggles for access to abortion services to other struggles against oppression. They formed Reproductive Justice NB and together with the Fredericton Youth Feminists, a group of Fredericton-based high school students, they fundraised the money needed to finance the opening of Clinic 554. Months after the closure of the Morgentaler Clinic, Clinic 554 was providing abortion services in the same location as the old Morgentaler Clinic

Hannah Gray of Reproductive Justice NB claimed that in a meeting she had with New Brunswick’s Health Minister Victor Boudreau, he did not ask for information from Clinic 554 regarding who is accessing the services at the clinic and that this further demonstrates a lack of concern for those needing the service.

Edelman suggested that New Brunswick should adopt Newfoundland’s policy, which is both viable and fiscally responsible. Edelman stressed that “cost should not be a consideration, but, in this case, it is cheaper to do abortions in clinics.”

Edelman asserted that everyone with a Medicare card should be given abortion access and stressed that “protection of public health care depends on equal access to hospitals and clinics.” At Clinic 554, abortion is the only service not covered. The government has “no problem with funding diabetes, just abortion,” said Edelman.

Marilyn Merritt-Gray, a nurse practitioner and member of Reproductive Justice NB, argued that “people should be at the heart of health care” and that the province has “lost its focus.” She emphasized the need for proper reproductive health education for young adults and teens.

Hughes stated that progress is being made with regards to this issue because the “conversation has changed” and she quipped that she can identify this because “the quality of the hate mail she receives has changed.”

Gray also stressed the need for better birth control access in the province, stating that youth have been denied birth control because they were not in a committed relationship.

Hughes claimed that it is reasonable to estimate that 1000 women have been unable to gain the proper access to abortion services within the province.

The panel was organized by Abbey LeJeune, a grade 11 student and member of the Fredericton Youth Feminists, for her English class.

Christopher Pearson is a fourth year Philosophy and Psychology student doing a UNB Arts 3000 placement with the NB Media Co-op.

food, and property clashes between farmers and the biotechnology industry. Visit: theplayhouse.ca.

Pamela Palmater on Sovereignty Changes Everything: Understanding Canada’s Commitment to Nation to Nation Relations with First Nations. Mon, March 21 at 3 p.m. in Carleton Hall, Room 106, UNB Fredericton. Palmater is a Mi’kmaw lawyer, author, and social justice activist from Eel River Bar First nation in New Brunswick and currently Chair in Indigenous Governance at Ryerson University. Palmater’s new book *Indigenous Nationhood* will be available for purchase. Hosted by the UNB Law In Society Program and Department of Sociology.

Cinema Politica believes in the power of art not only to entertain but to engage, inform, inspire, and provoke social change. Cinema Politica Fredericton screens films on Friday nights at Conserver House, 180 St. John St. at 7:00pm. Check out films and venues at: cinemapolitica.org.

Support The Brief

Independent journalism by the NB Media Co-op

Join

Become a member of your local media co-op. Memberships are \$30/year.

Donate

The NB Media Co-op is supported with donations from individuals, labour unions and social justice groups. Donate today and help us grow.

Memberships and donations can be paid online at nbmediacoop.org or by sending a cheque made out to the NB Media Co-op at the address below.

Volunteer

☐ Research, write, edit, factcheck stories

☐ Distribute The Brief

☐ Organize special events

☐ Sign up for monthly email alerts.

Email: _____

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