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

BY TRACY GLYNN and ASAF RASHID

As of April 1, 2015, temporary foreign workers in low-wage occupations in Canada had four-year work permits before returning to work in Canada. Migrante Canada, a human rights organization, is one of 250,000,000 global migrants, according to 2015 statistics from the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Many migrants are forced to return to work 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.

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Fredericton - Permanent residency, open work permits and access to essential services like health care were demonstrated by human rights and labor union representatives, 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 they are not sure what’s going to happen. They simply want 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 for 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 Nominee Program that, despite its problems, is seen as one of the only paths to permanent residency.

Damasco worries about her friends with the establishment of the 30% cap by the former Harper government, that wages and deducts 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 a test and many of her friends have not passed or are too scared to take. “We don’t what’s going to happen to them,” said Damasco.

One fish plant worker at the forum, “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.

“All 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 confronted by a lack of the power to access services and leave and out who we consider underserving, sometimes to die,” said Jennifer Henry, Executive Director of CUPE, an international labor union organized 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 ‘4 and 4 rule’, according to Jesson Reyes, Migrante Canada’s regional coordinator.

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 year. 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 good 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 criminalize 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 removes a woman’s right to choose.

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 1990.

McKenna said at the time, “If Mr. Morgentaler tries to get a clinic in the province of New Brunswick, he’s going to get the fight of his life.”
By ASUS 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 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 attempt to reach 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 involves situations 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 their entry to their destination, they are being smuggled.

Quite often, refugees and migrants are themselves involved in administering these journeys. In other words, refugees and migrants are themselves human smugglers.

A term often used interchangeably — and irresponsibly — with smuggling is “trafficking.” This term refers to the transport of people for the purpose of exploitation — i.e., forced labor, sexual exploitation or organs.

The NATO anti-smuggling mission and its contradictions

Jens Stoltenberg, NATO’s secretary-general, explained that the anti-smuggling operation’s purpose is as follows: “helping Greece, Turkey and the European Union with stemming the flow of refugees and migrants and legalizing the smuggling.”

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

The report, like many others on this subject, attempts to attribute blame to individuals who are in fact the victims. Human smugglers, like refugees and migrants, are also people who are driven by desperation 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 extremely absurd. That is precisely the mission’s overall objective.

Asaf Rashid is an organizer with Refugees Welcome Fredericton.

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

Pamela Palmar on Sovereignty Changes Everything: Understanding Canada’s Commitment to Nation to Nation Relations

Wildlino Community will be held on Monday, January 30 at 7 p.m. in Carleton Hall, Room 106, UNB Fredericton. This is a free, public presentation by a First Nation student activist from Eel River Bar First Nation in New Brunswick and currently Chair in Indigenous Governance at Ryerson University. Palmar’s book, Sovereignty Changes Everything, will be available for purchase. Hosted by the UNB Law in Society Program and Department of Sociology.

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