



The Brief

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“It is New Brunswick that enriches the Irvings, not the Irvings that enrich New Brunswick:” An interview with Alain Deneault

By THE NB MEDIA CO-OP



Alain Deneault is a French Canadian intellectual and author of many books including *Legalizing Theft: A Short Guide to Tax Havens*. Photo by Yves Renaud.

According to its website, the renowned French journal *Le Monde diplomatique* (LMD) is “a truly international newspaper linking people who take a serious interest in world events across the globe,” read by more than two million people with 37 different print and Internet editions, published in 20 languages. That is why it is worth reporting that our own little corner of the world is getting big attention in an article published in the April 2019 edition of *LMD* by Alain Deneault, a scholar based in New Brunswick.

“The Irvings, Canada’s robber barons” concisely relates the political and economic power that one family with many industrial businesses has over our region, and the challenges facing people who wish to promote an open society and functioning democracy. In our interview, Alain Deneault discusses the issues he raises in his *LMD* article.

You use the term “feudalism” to describe the political and economic conditions in New Brunswick. What is feudalism, and why is it the right word for the system we have in this province?

I note first of all that this metaphor is frequently used for describing the situation in New Brunswick among journalists from outside the province who are not particularly known for being fiercely radical critics, for example Diane Francis or Peter C. Newman. The Irving conglomerate is different from other contemporary industrial and financial corporations in the way that it super-exploits a relatively confined area, rather than spreading its structures across the world and its activities to a variety of jurisdictions.

In the northeast of North America, we see [the Irving conglomerate] in the fields of oil, mining, timber, transportation, the food industry, restaurants, media, etc. Its 200 companies criss-cross the region while being administered in a very opaque way, especially from the tax haven of Bermuda. Its omnipresence makes it less a business than a sovereign power, frequently able to veto any important legislation in the region.

Many even-handed books contain a number of pages showing how a government could not be formed here without the approval of this powerful family. I’m thinking, for example, of Louis Robichaud’s biography written by Michel Cormier who recently has been Executive Director, News and Current Affairs at Radio Canada.

There are moments when this relationship of domination takes on a legal dimension. Charles Thériault, a prominent Irving in matters of forestry policy, has revealed that the framework through which the government surrenders forestry management to the private sector cannot be revised without the approval of one of the Irving businesses. These kinds of observations abound, and the fact that the current premier comes from the Irving fold only reinforces this impression.

You call the Irving group a “second government” in New Brunswick and in the region. What do you mean by this exactly?

The family acts in the old manner of a colonial governor, for whom the legislative assembly was merely a chamber for recording his will, a kind of bailiff. But even beyond the way they finance or support this or that community project, municipal infrastructure, cultural institution, university research centre, or candidate for office, they are able to substitute for departments of education, higher research, culture, youth and sports, municipal affairs, etc. It is almost impossible anywhere in Atlantic Canada to avoid running into the name “Irving” in a museum, a library, a university, a sports centre, and so forth.

It’s becoming embarrassing. You end up encountering the name more often than that of the government and a stranger who landed here without being told where he is could think himself in a conquered land. The Maritimes are Irving territory, a kind of “Saudi Arabia” as they say, or Irvingland.

You emphasize in the article that there are important differences between some multinational corporations, such as Total, and the Irving group. What are these differences, and what are the resulting differences in the field of politics?

Contemporary multinationals are sprawling and globalized. They are also usually publicly traded, which forces them to disclose a certain amount of information. Their desire for expansion results from the quest for new markets on a planetary scale.

But the Irvings have developed their structures in a productive corner of the country, forgotten by the public authorities and big capital, in a bid to marginalize competition. Multinationals like Shell, Total and Exxon are led to act in a concerted manner, notwithstanding the

continued on page 2

Andrea Bear Nicholas analyses Maliseet history with settler colonialism

By GERRY MCALISTER

Understanding history is crucial to shaping the common future of Indigenous peoples and settlers. On April 11, Andrea Bear Nicholas shared her knowledge of the history of the Indigenous people in the land now known as New Brunswick. Bear Nicholas, who uses the term “Maliseet” for her people and language, also known as Wolastoqiyik, spoke to a packed room of about 100 people at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery in Fredericton.

Bear Nicholas, professor emeritus and chair of Native Studies for 20 years at St. Thomas University, is a recognized expert in Native languages and has organized immersion and teaching programs in the Maliseet language at Sitansik (St. Mary’s First Nation) and elsewhere.

Her talk, focused on the wider Fredericton area, reviewed the early Indigenous presence based on evidence including rock paintings and tools dating back 13,000 years.

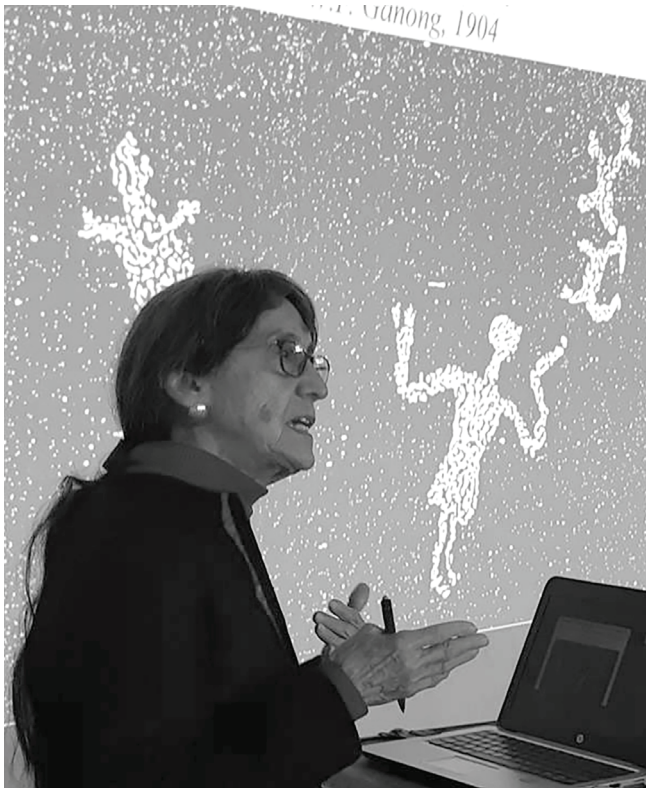
During a series of wars between French and English colonial powers, from 1675 to 1760 and again from 1776 to 1783, the Wabanaki Confederacy, including the Maliseet, generally took the French side. However, the French betrayed the Maliseet by handing over Native land to the English in the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713. Subsequently the Maliseet signed treaties with the English Crown in 1721 and 1725, guaranteeing, among other things, hunting and fishing rights forever.

The Crown, in London, forbade any appropriation of or settlement on Native lands. This was ignored by local settlers who proceeded to displace the Native people from their lands and move them to what is now the St. Mary’s reserve.

What followed led to a reduction of the Native population from 1,500 in 1783 to 300 in 1850. Severe malnutrition and starvation played a role, genocide by any other name. Bear Nicholas illustrated that period with a series of images showing how colonial artists, usually military personnel, portrayed the Maliseet in a prosperous light even though the population was being decimated by hunger and disease.

Bear Nicholas finished her talk with an appeal for the return of the remains of two of her community’s ancestors believed to have been in the possession of the Fredericton Region Museum at one point. The request was endorsed by the audience. The event ended with a presentation by Anne Marie Lane Jonah, a Parks Canada historian: ‘Uncovering Siksik: A Shared River Journey,’ which fit well with the themes of the Bear Nicholas talk.

Gerry McAlister delivers *The Brief* in Fredericton.



Andrea Bear Nicholas spoke about Maliseet history in Fredericton on April 11. Photo from the Fredericton Region Museum.

It is New Brunswick that enriches the Irvings

competitive relationship they maintain among themselves, when they need to curry favour with one of the many states in which they operate. This opens up the game a little, while in the Maritimes, the family holds outrageous power. From legislators, they managed to obtain both tax benefits and a readiness to oblige, in ways that have been rarely seen.

Journalists such as Jacques Poitras and Bruce Livesey have written on the Irvings, yet little seems to have changed. Why is this so? When do you think things will change, and the people will be ready to confront the Irvings’ power? What needs to change for this to happen, and what might lead to such a development?

Jacques Poitras is a journalist of the extreme centre who has mostly composed a family drama, in which he mechanically compares the Irving conglomerate’s propaganda with the critical discourse about it, for the sake of a supposedly balanced position that is weak and without scope.

As for Bruce Livesey’s reporting for the *National Observer*, it is formidable and welcome. It covers all sectors, from the environment to the thirst for expansion across the northeast of the continent, while bringing attention to media concentration and practices of intimidation.

It is impossible to know what type of initiative will bring about change. Every moment of audacity, every time people stand up to the abuse of power, every public response to the public statements of the family, every transgression of the unwritten laws that are in fact losing their effectiveness, every dead star we end up distinguishing as such – these are all part of a long-term historical movement. Today, for instance, Green Party members are raising the issue of the Irvings’ domination as never before in the Legislative Assembly. It gives the impression of a society where tongues are becoming untied. Each occasion widens the breach.

The publication of your article in *Le Monde diplomatique* indicates that an international audience can take an interest in what is happening in our part of the world. What effect might this have?

Other countries need to understand that Canada was and remains a colony, that we are not yet, nor have we ever been, citizens of a republic, or of any kind of democratic order, but that we remain subjects of Her Majesty, a euphemism for “colonials.” Thus, our common territory, our lands, our forests, our waters, our public institutions are not really our own. Formally, they belong to the “Crown,” which accords them a political status conceptually different from that of being publicly-owned. The Crown does not belong to the public, and it has sought historically to allow the ruling classes to profit from the wealth of our territory. The family feudalism of New Brunswick is merely the aggravated form of this system.

We must show how the situation here, in which we are born, that we deal with every day as our parents did, that we end up integrating, is in reality anything but ordinary in the eyes of the stranger that visits this place.

In the West, practically no other population is still so subservient to their local family of lords. This remarkable context has been noted by others. It is obvious: it is New Brunswick that enriches the Irvings, and not the Irvings that enrich New Brunswick.

If we can collectively, by stepping back from ourselves and seeing ourselves from the eyes of outsiders, change our perceptions accordingly, and develop a critical sensibility instead of submitting to an ideology to which we are far too accustomed, then we will progress.

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Outgoing CUPE NB president Daniel Légère praised as an ‘elevater’

By TRACY GLYNN



Daniel Légère speaking at a rally against fracking for shale gas in Moncton in 2012. Photo by Tracy Glynn.

A chapter in the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) New Brunswick’s history has closed with Daniel Légère’s end of tenure as the union’s president. Labour leaders and social justice advocates in New Brunswick are remembering his time as president as a remarkable one for leadership and solidarity.

At the CUPE NB Convention in Fredericton on April 11, members of the province’s largest union elected a new president, Brien Watson. Watson will replace Légère, who held the position for 14 years.

Patrick Colford, president of the New Brunswick Federation of Labour, calls Légère “an elevater.”

“Nelson Mandela once said, ‘It is better to lead from behind and to put others in front, especially when you celebrate victory when nice things occur. You take the front line when there is danger. Then people will appreciate your leadership.’ This quote summarizes Danny Légère’s leadership style. He has always been an ‘elevater,’ lifting people up and helping them both realize their full potential and ensuring that they reach their potential,” says Colford.

Légère’s union activism began the day he became a worker almost 40 years ago. As a correctional officer in St. Hilaire, he became the shop steward and was supporting worker grievances before he had even passed his probationary period.

Sandy Harding, Vice-President of CUPE NB, says, “Danny is a principled, passionate and dedicated leader. During his 14 years as CUPE NB president, he grew the membership and engaged workers the likes of which has not been seen in decades. He left CUPE NB in a better and stronger place.”

Making L’Acadie Nouvelle’s top 30 list of most influential New Brunswick francophones in 2017 and 2018, Légère has been a spokesperson for better wages and pensions, pay equity, new legislation on first contract arbitration and a critical voice against privatization of health care and public services.

Not only a fierce defender of his union’s membership, which includes nursing home workers, health care workers, child care providers, school bus drivers, librarians and other workers across the province, Légère can also be found on picket lines and rallies in solidarity with other workers and marginalized groups here in New Brunswick and across the world.

David Frank, a labour historian, notes Légère’s social unionism. According to Frank, “The most important thing to know about Danny Légère is that he came up through the ranks of a union that values active membership engagement at all levels, from its locals and councils to the provincial division. As a leader, he has helped make CUPE NB a strong voice for the kind of social unionism that advances the interests of all working people in the province.”

A strong supporter of CUPE’s global justice campaigns, Légère is also active with the New Democratic Party and the Common Front for Social Justice, the province’s largest anti-poverty group.

Légère has joined other union leaders and students to protest the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement, extended his support to Colombian and Filipino workers at times that called for cross-border worker solidarity, and joined Mi’kmaq and Wolastoqiyik peoples and allies at Idle No More actions.

“Danny has been a friend, a mentor, and a confidant to so many during his tenure as CUPE NB president. He will leave a huge void, but with his leadership and mentoring he has paved the way for other leaders to take the reins. Danny has garnered the respect of Canadians from coast to coast to coast. His legacy will live on throughout the labour movement for many, many years to come,” says Colford.

Tracy Glynn, an editorial board member of the NB Media Co-op, has worked with Daniel Légère in numerous coalitions and networks, including in solidarity with workers in Colombia.

The Lac-Mégantic disaster, New Brunswick, and Irving companies: an interview with Bruce Campbell

By SUSAN O’DONNELL



Author Bruce Campbell. Photo by Ben Welland.

The Lac-Mégantic rail disaster and an Irving company, NB Southern Railway, were together in the same CBC news story last week as a court case wound up in Saint John.

Author Bruce Campbell was in New Brunswick in April to launch his new book: *The Lac-Mégantic Rail Disaster: Public Betrayal, Justice Denied*. Campbell’s book analyzes the history of the complex relationships linking railways, the oil industry, a government regulatory system captured by industry, and the devastation of a rural town in Quebec on July 6, 2013.

Campbell, an adjunct professor in Environmental Studies at York University and senior fellow at the Ryerson University Centre for Free Expression, is a former executive director of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, one of Canada’s leading independent think-tanks, and the author of three major reports on the Lac-Mégantic rail disaster.

In this interview with the NB Media Co-op, Campbell discusses the relationships between the Lac-Mégantic disaster, New Brunswick, and Irving companies.

NBMC: The investigation into the Lac-Mégantic disaster triggered legal charges against Irving Oil, and the NB Southern Railway, a subsidiary of J.D. Irving. What were the charges and outcomes?

Campbell: Following the Lac-Mégantic disaster, Irving Oil, as importer of the fateful shipment of Bakken shale oil from North Dakota, was charged with 34 counts of violating the Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act: 14,000 tank cars of crude oil were hauled on its behalf from November 2012 to July 6, 2013 [one-third went through Lac-Mégantic]. Irving Oil, after lengthy negotiations, pleaded guilty to all counts in October 2017, paying \$4 million — \$400,000 in penalties and a \$3.6 million contribution to support safety research on the transportation of dangerous goods.

Irving Oil was also a defendant in civil suits [wrongful death, class-action], contributing \$75 million to the settlement in these cases. The federal government also contributed \$75 million. CP is the lone defendant that refused to settle and is still in court.

The Montreal, Maine and Atlantic Railway was carrying the shipment imported by Irving Oil that derailed in Lac-Mégantic. A different railway, the Irving-owned NB Southern Railway, was scheduled to haul this shipment the last leg of the journey to Saint John.

NB Southern was charged in 2018 with incidents related to hauling dangerous goods on this route stemming from 2012 up until the day before the disaster: 24 counts of violating the transportation of dangerous goods act — 12 counts for failing to create proper shipping documentation and 12 counts for having unqualified personnel offering dangerous goods (crude oil) for transport. The danger was to people living in New Brunswick.

It initially pled not guilty but on April 18, 2019 reached a plea agreement with federal prosecutors, pleading guilty to two counts of failing to properly document crude oil tank cargo and paying \$50,000: \$10,000 in penalties and \$40,000 in payments to support safety improvements in the transportation of dangerous goods.

The Lac-Mégantic Citizens Coalition is reportedly very disappointed with the plea agreement; both the low fine and other monetary payments, and the fact that it was reached with the NB Southern Railway pleading guilty to just two of the 24 counts with which it was charged.

To read the full interview, visit: nbmediacoop.org.

Susan O’Donnell is a board member of the NB Media Co-op and the primary investigator of the RAVEN project at the University of New Brunswick.