Indigenous peoples across Canada are decrying the Supreme Court of Canada ruling on Oct. 11, 2018, that the federal government is not obligated to consult with Indigenous peoples before a law is passed in Parliament. Laws passed could interfere with Indigenous treaty rights.

The Wolastoq Grand Council Chief is reminding people that the Wolastoqiyik of what is known today as the Saint John River Valley “never surrendered one inch of land, one drop of water.”

The Mikisew Cree First Nation of Alberta took the case to the Supreme Court in response to two federal bills introduced by the Harper government in 2012 that gutted Canada’s environmental laws. The Mikisew Cree and other Indigenous activists argue that changes to the environmental laws also infringe on their hunting and fishing rights.

Wolastoq Grand Council Chief Ron Tremblay, whose Wolastoq name is Spasasqit Possemaw, told CBC on Oct. 11 that he “is drastically disappointed” by the Supreme Court ruling.

Since becoming the hereditary chief in 2015, Tremblay has driven efforts to return the Saint John River to its original name, the Wolastoq. The Wolastoq runs through many of New Brunswick’s rural areas, making it possible for the many farms and villages along the river valley to exist and survive.

Tremblay wants settlers to lobby their government officials to change the name of the river. “It’s not up to Indigenous people to ask permission of the Premier or Mayors to change the name back to the Wolastoq since no one asked our ancestors about changing the name,” says Tremblay.

Tremblay is worried that the recent Supreme Court ruling will further degrade an already poor obligatory level of consultation on resource development on Indigenous territory, such as with the Sisson mine project. He supports the Wolastoq Band Chief Hugh Akagi, Tremblay spoke out against the Sisson mine project at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York in April 2018. The mining company has failed to properly consult with Indigenous peoples before a law is passed in Parliament. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans has recently asked First Nations in the Wolastoq territory for meetings on the Schedule 2 amendments.

With ten grandsons, Tremblay has been a champion of Indigenous rights all his life. Growing up in rural Tobique First Nation, Tremblay witnessed firsthand the degradation of the Tobique River. “Some of these messages talk about “poor Anglos not getting work because they don’t speak French.” While the unemployment rate for all New Brunswickers tends to be higher than the national average, the unemployment rate for Francophones in New Brunswick is actually higher than that of Anglophones. In 2016, the unemployment rate for Francophones in the province was 12.4% versus 10.4% for Anglophones. This trend has been in place for decades. (For the record, the unemployment rate across New Brunswick is now around 7.5%, a marked decrease but still higher than the national average.)

Another absurd claim that is sometimes trotted out by anti-duality advocates is that Francophones make up a majority (some 85% supposedly!) of public sector jobs in New Brunswick despite only making up about 30% of the population. Well, unsurprisingly, this is simply not true either. Francophones make up around 43% of public sector jobs with variation among different sectors. That’s nowhere close to the 85% I hear bandied about along with hateful stereotyping of Acadians. Even so, there’s a pretty obvious reason for that discrepancy. We are a bilingual province which necessitates bilingual service provision in our public sector. Francophones are historically much more likely to be functionally bilingual because they are essentially forced to learn English to obtain employment and function in a predominantly English province and society.

Bilingualism in New Brunswick. Usually these comments have little to do with actual numbers but instead focus on world governments while Indigenous voices are sidelined. We are a bilingual province which necessitates bilingual service provision in our public sector. Francophones are historically much more likely to be functionally bilingual because they are essentially forced to learn English to obtain employment and function in a predominantly English province and society.

Whether in the assembly rooms of the United Nations (UN) or on the frontlines of Indigenous resistance at Elsipogtog, Tremblay is not afraid to put his body in front of the oppressive structures that are harming his nation and all indigenous nations.

Accompanied by Indigenous youth and Passamaquoddy Chief Hugh Akagi, Tremblay spoke out against the Sisson mine project at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous issues in New York in April 2018. He told the Forum that the mining company has failed to properly consult with Indigenous peoples before a law is passed in Parliament. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans has recently asked First Nations in the Wolastoq territory for meetings on the Schedule 2 amendments.

With ten grandsons, Tremblay has been a champion of Indigenous rights all his life. Growing up in rural Tobique First Nation, Tremblay witnessed firsthand the degradation of the Tobique River. “We never surrendered:” Wolastoq Grand Council Chief

First Nation, Tremblay witnessed firsthand the degradation of the Tobique River. Beginning in 1950, NB Power dammed the river for hydroelectricity generation. Abundant Atlantic salmon used to travel through it but today, the salmon are gone.

Alma Brooks, a Wolastoq clan grandmother, is grateful for Tremblay’s “strong determination to protect mother earth.” Brooks notes that Tremblay is a carrier of their people’s sacred pipe and a speaker, teacher and champion of the endangered Wolastoqey language.

Fellow Tobique native, Jeremy Dutcher, shone national attention on the Wolastoqey language and culture when he told CBC viewers, “We are witnessing an Indigenous renaissance” before accepting the 2018 Polaris Prize for his album, Wolastoqiyik Lintuwakonawa. On Sept. 17, when Dutcher performs, he acknowledges Passamaquoddy elder, Maggie Paul, for inspiring him to share the traditional songs of their people.

Like Dutcher and Paul, Tremblay is keeping Wolastoqey culture alive. He regularly invites youth, elders and others to take part in sacred ceremonies. About a decade ago, Tremblay was asked to design a flag for the Wolastoqey Nation by then Wolastoq Grand Council Chief Harry LaPorte. Tremblay says the design, two canoes following a muskrat, is a part of a Wolastoqey story shared with him by Brooks. “Ron works very hard to represent those who have no voice and deserves a lot of acknowledgement and credit for all that he does with little help and practically no resources to speak of,” says Brooks.

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Spraying glyphosate on Crown forests becomes political

By SUSAN O’DONNELL

Stop Spraying NB organized a discussion with a representation from four political parties on a ban to glyphosate in forestry operations on Oct. 17, 2018. Photo by Susan O’Donnell.

After decades of petitions, protests, meetings and rallies, New Brunswick residents opposed to spraying glyphosate on public lands are finally seeing progress in the legislature. The Liberal throne speech on October 23 included a promise to introduce a motion to directly legislate a committee to consider recommending a phased-in ban on the use of herbicides, such as glyphosate, with the scope of the ban to be based on ecological sustainability, fairness for private woodlot owners and independent sawmill operators, and acknowledgment of Aboriginal rights. Coon’s promise was not debated in the legislature because the government and opposition did not support it. The new legislature includes three Green MLAs and three People’s Alliance MLAs. Both parties had election platform commitments to end the practice of spraying glyphosate on public lands.

Almost two years ago, in December 2016, Green Party Leader David Coon proposed legislation to amend the Crown Lands and Forests Act to replace clearcutting and glyphosate spraying with a forest management plan based on ecological sustainability, fairness for private woodlot owners and independent sawmill operators, and acknowledgment of Aboriginal rights. Coon’s promise was not debated in the legislature because the government and opposition did not support it. The new legislature includes three Green MLAs and three People’s Alliance MLAs. Both parties had election platform commitments to end the practice of spraying glyphosate on public lands.

For Coon, the recent progress on the glyphosate ban is one step further in his multi-year quest to have the herbicide banned from provincial forests. Before he became a politician, he led the Montfort Elementary School in Fredericton, New Brunswick, an area heavily dependent on the forests for its economy and community livelihood.

That promise followed a meeting on Oct. 17, organized by Stop Spraying in New Brunswick (SSNB), the first time all the parties in the Legislature met to discuss a proposal to stop granting licenses to spray glyphosate on public forests. Liberal and PC governments have refused to end the practice, although recently the PCs have indicated they would be willing to consider it. The new legislature includes three Green MLAs and three People’s Alliance MLAs. Both parties had election platform commitments to end the practice of spraying glyphosate on public lands.

Over the past few years, SSNB has made presentations and organized public meetings and protests in many areas to help build awareness. In some groups, alluded to SSNB have organized events in areas specifically affected by spraying, such as the EcoVie biologist of JD Irving, the largest user of glyphosate in New Brunswick, who spoke about spraying, as illustrated by the student Earth Day event held recently in Basinville.

At least one conservation group with ties to JD Irving has been intimidated from going public with details about the spraying program. In August, a representative of the Miramichi Headwaters Salmon Federation stated that he was warned by the chief biologist of JD Irving, the largest user of glyphosate in forestry, that the Federation would face reprimands if it went public with their opposition to spraying at a press conference. Given the warning, a director of the Federation did participate in the press conference.

New Brunswick uses more glyphosates in forestry than any other province. A report by the Chief Medical Officer of Health in New Brunswick found that 40% of the province’s non-agricultural land use is sprayed with glyphosate, compared to 28% in Ontario and 11% in Nova Scotia. In 2001, Quebec banned herbicides in their Crown forest. Dozens of other jurisdictions across Canada, in the US, Europe and around the world have outright or partial bans of the toxic chemical. In New Brunswick, SSNB wants to see a stop spraying bill passed as one of the first pieces of legislation in the new legislature.

“Whatever we surrended”

criminalization that is commonly faced by Indigenous land defenders and their allies on the fronts lines of resistance to oil and gas pipelines, energy development, and development projects such as Energy East. More than two decades later, Tremblay found himself in the front of armed police again, this time the RCMP. He had joined land defenders opposed to fracking for shale gas in the West Block of the Mackenzie Resources’ shale gas trucks and equipment on Mi’kmaq territory, off a highway near Renton. Tremblay and other 15 land defenders were arrested during one of the 13 anti-shale gas blockades actions in June 2013.

Policing Indigenous Movements is a new book on state surveillance of Indigenous activists by Andrew Cosby and Jeffrey Monaghan. The authors uncovered that the RCMP were secretly investigating Indigenous activists in an operation called, Project Silka. Thirty-five of the 89 Indigenous activists profiled were all in the same boat: the police felt that the Conse of the RCMP were not precise enough to be classified as Indigenous. Of the 35 activists, 33 were made of the Peace and Friendship Alliance, bringing together Indigenous people and allies across Wabanaki territory, to oppose risky resource development and honour the Peace and Friendship treaty signed between the Indigenous peoples and British Crown, starting in 1725. With New Brunswick putting into place a moratorium on shale gas, and the Energy East pipeline, and several of New Brunswick’s newly elected MLAs being against spraying the forest, the strength of such alliances cannot be underestimated.

State surveillance, arrests and court rulings do not deter Tremblay. He remains steadfast in his work to protect the land, water, air and all life.

This article was made possible with support from RAVEN – Rural Action & Voices for the Environment, projects such as Energy East. As the summer of 2017, the night before a solidarity caravan set off to the Wolastoq First Nations community, Tremblay was followed out of a National Energy Board hearing on the Energy East pipeline at a Fredericton hotel by RCMP Constable Janine Spacek. Spacek wanted more information about plans for the proposed extension of the TransCanada East pipeline, and several of New Brunswick’s newly elected MLAs being against spraying the forest, the strength of such alliances cannot be underestimated.

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