“We’re going to stand up and be counted.” Miramichi rallies against job losses

By TERRY WISHART

About 400 Miramichi mill and hospital workers and their supporters gathered on August 8 to demand the return of their jobs. Miramichi has experienced severe job losses with future cuts planned.

Town hall organizer Aaron Allison opened the meeting, saying the people of the Miramichi “are going to stand up and be counted.”

The jobs of at least 40 workers at Hebert’s Recycling are on the line as that company faces a shutdown in the fall.

Fred Hamilton, operations manager at Hebert’s Recycling, said the company is committed to providing good jobs in the community. Hebert’s Recycling receives no public funds in the form of government transfers.

The company and workers oppose the plan to transfer their work to out-of-province companies jointly owned by Pepsi and Coca Cola beverage container company Encore Atlantic. They call for legislation to ensure beverage containers are processed in the province. This simple move would ensure their operation in the Miramichi.

Further cuts are planned to other industries that affect Miramichi workers. Around 300 public employees at two Miramichi regional senior care homes have been told to reapply for their positions, which will be fewer and lower-paying.

On behalf of the senior care professionals, CUPE official Patrick Roy said it is unconscionable that health care services such as the proposed public-private partnership (P3) seniors’ care facilities profit from the care and well-being of our elderly while government auditors’ consistently conclude that P3 ventures cost significantly more to operate than publicly run services.

The Miramichi town hall meeting was attended by Progressive Conservative MLA’s Danny Anderson, Jake Stewart, and NDP and People’s Alliance Party representatives and company managers. Two empty chairs, representing the Liberal MLAs Bill Fraser and Lisa Harris made the absence of these representatives at the town hall notable. Stewart defended the Alward government’s lack of consultation with the J.D. Irving Ltd, that resulted in the company gaining an excess of 440,000 cubic metres of additional wood per year for 25 years from New Brunswick’s public forest.

Danny Anderson, president of Miramichi Lumber Mill, spoke to the crowd about pre-election guarantees from Premiers Alward and Gallant that Crown forest wood would be processed at the mill.

He described the “amnesia” that appeared to set in shortly after they were elected to office. Anderson said that the mill’s management merely wanted a guaranteed allotment of wood to remain in operation.

Anderson said Miramichi Lumber is regularly contacted by investors interested in the Miramichi. Potential investors are turned away because there’s “not one stick of wood being processed in the Miramichi” as Anderson pointed out. He stated “If a company in the Miramichi can’t cut wood then no one should be cutting wood.”

Miramichi Lumber Financial Officer Hal Raper described the company’s plan to build a privately invested $200 million wood fiber processing facility in the town of Bathurst. The Miramichi mill would have processed scrap wood into engineered wood products and created energy for the electrical grid.

“We couldn’t get a meeting with (Alward’s) Minister or the Deputy Minister. We didn’t even get a question or the Deputy’s response,” Raper said. “How is it possible unless someone else controls the wood supply in New Brunswick?”

Terry Wishart is a member of the Fredericton Chapter of the Council of Canadians and Green Party representative for the Mactaquac-Tobique Riding in the 2015 federal election.
Killing with kindness? Fredericton’s response to panhandling

By ASAF RASHID

Fredericton - Downtown Fredericton Inc., in partnership with the City of Fredericton, recently installed new "kindness meters" in the downtown area as part of a strategy to end panhandling.

The meters are refurbished parking meters, painted green and put on downtown sidewalks in areas frequently used by panhandlers and buskers. They each contain the message, "Panhandling is not the answer: donate your spare change to this kindness meter and make a difference. Money collected by this meter will support income streams for those who panhandle. Within the last 15 years, two bottle exchange plants moved out of the downtown area. Ericson says that the city is considering bringing back bottle exchange plants to the downtown area as a means to provide opportunity for those in need."

Currently, the only piece of the panhandling strategy in place are the kindness meters. The Joint Task Force on Panhandling is expecting them to yield results. However, Ericson notes that their effectiveness in combating panhandling in Montreal, Ottawa, Windsor and Victoria is unknown.

Ericson wants the province of New Brunswick to join the city of Fredericton in their anti-poverty measures. "We have yet to have provincial members at the table, which is a tremendous loss. The Department of Social Development, is within their mandate. Their absence diminishes our chances to do anything effective," says Ericson.

Also notably absent from the panhandling committee have been panhandlers and buskers. "There has not yet been members invited to the table who have lived experiences of poverty... I want them to sit at the table," says Ericson.

Roy says that no one asked for his opinion on where resources for the poor should be spent - namely, money from the kindness meters. Roy, like many other panhandlers, see themselves as misunderstood. "I'm not a bum, just a panhandler," says Roy.

Two days after the NB Media Co-op interviewed Roy, he said he was told by police to put his panhandling cup away. Asaf Rashid is a writer for the NB Media Co-op and host of From the Margins, a campus radio show that airs on Monday nights at 8pm on CHSR 97.9.

In Brief

An online petition is asking New Brunswick Health Minister Victor Boudreau to follow the actions of PEI and fund gender-confirming surgeries now. New Brunswick is the only province in Canada to not fund gender-confirming surgeries.

Kyla Jamieson, a student in the Explore program at the Université du Trois Rivières campus in Québec is denouncing rape culture embedded in French language program. Jamieson left the program when staff performed a date rape drug skit that was inappropriate because a would-be rapist deemed one girl too unattractive to try to rape her. Jamieson opposes the lack of will by administration to address her objections to the skit. She says they have also been inactive on a series of sexual harassment and assault incidents against prior Explore participants.

The combined costs of Harper’s enhanced Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) plan and income splitting policy, about $7 ion, is only benefiting wealthy households while not creating child care spaces, according to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Accessible child care advocates say that $7 billion should rather be spent on providing Canadians with a $7/day childcare program. Quebec already has a $7/day childcare program.

Community Calendar

NB Media Co-op 6th Annual General Meeting. Tues., Sept. 29 at 6:00pm at St. Thomas University. Join us in electing our new board and reviewing last year’s highlights and planning for next year. All are welcome but you must be a member to vote. With special guest speaker, author Alain Deneault, on tax havens and the Irving’s. Opening remarks by the NB Prosperity and Not Austerity Coalition. Contact: info@nblinkmedia.coop.

World March of Women in Fredericton. Sat., Oct. 17. Featuring a march and inspiring speakers. “We are not free, until we are all free!” Contact worldmarchwomenfredericton@gmail.com.

Canada in Africa. Join author Yves Engler for the launch of his book on Sun., Oct. 18 at 5:30pm at Three Sisters Cafe, 289 Regent St., Fredericton. Contact: info@nblinkmedia.coop.

Cinema Politica believes in the power of art not only to entertain but to engage, inform, inspire, and provoke social change. Cinema Politica is the largest community and campus-based documentary-screening network in the world. Cinema Politica Fredericton screens films on Friday nights. Check out the films and venues at: cinemapolitica.org.