



The Brief

Vol. 7 No. 2

A publication of the NB Media Co-op

October 2015

nbmediacoop.org

“Death took them because we didn’t:” Fredericton rallies to open the borders for refugees

By TRACY GLYNN



Over 100 people attended the “Refugees Welcome! Rally in Fredericton on Sept. 12. Signs read “Freedom to move, freedom to return, freedom to stay.”
Photo by Gül Çalışkan.

Over 100 people rallied in Fredericton on Saturday, Sept. 12 to denounce Canada’s inhumane refugee policies and participation in wars and occupations that created the conditions that the people of Syria, Iraq, Palestine and elsewhere are currently fleeing.

The rally was part of emergency cross-country actions that have been happening since the photograph of three-year-old Alan Kurdi’s lifeless body washed up on a shore in Turkey appeared almost two weeks ago.

Refugee rights groups across Canada are demanding that Immigration Minister Chris Alexander and Prime Minister Stephen Harper answer for the deaths of Kurdi and his five-year-old brother Ghalib and mother Rehanna.

“The Kurdi family was compelled to make their deadly journey due to Canada’s exclusionary refugee laws and policies. There is so much red tape to the refugee determination process that a family fleeing persecution doesn’t have time to deal with,” said Asaf Rashid, a migrant justice activist and law student at the University of New Brunswick.

“Due to the barriers that Canada now puts in place for refugee claimants, there has been a drop in the number of actual claims by 50% and a drop in accepted claims by 30%. But these numbers should be increasing, not decreasing. Today, there are more displaced people and refugees than at any time since World War II,” said Rashid.

“Almost 60 million people around the world have been forcibly displaced at the end of 2014, as a result of persecution, conflict and human rights violations, the highest level on record. Over 45,000 people have died crossing borders since 2000,” said Gül Çalışkan, a St. Thomas University sociology professor who specializes in global citizenship.

Organizers are convinced that they can change Canada’s refugee policies. Germans forced their government to change their refugee policies last week. Over 10,000 Icelandic families said they would open their homes to refugees.

“Over 86% of the world’s refugees are housed in developing countries. Canada needs to do more to welcome refugees,” argued Çalışkan.

International Development Minister Christian Paradis announced an emergency relief fund for conflict-affected people in Syria and neighbouring countries that will match donations from

Canadians up to \$100 million on the same day as the Fredericton rally. Paradis said the fund will be used to provide food, clothing and healthcare to refugees.

“It’s not enough,” said Çalışkan. “Canada needs a massive overhaul of the immigration system. Canada needs to do more to protect refugees and it needs to offer permanent residency for all migrants. Canada must support the end of violence and war in Syria but not with military intervention.”

Never Home (neverhome.ca), a recently launched multimedia resource, documents the devastating effects of Canada’s changes to its immigrant and refugee policies. According to No One Is Illegal, the Canadian government deported 117,531 people between 2006 and 2014. The majority of those refused entry are refugees.

The Canadian government’s policies towards select groups of refugees has not been welcoming, according to speakers at the rally.

“Canada presumes that people from Muslim countries have a high chance of being terrorists or connected with terrorism, so Muslim refugee claimants have to prove that they are not terrorists to pass the security clearance to qualify as a refugee in Canada... This is an entirely unreasonable presumption based on a contrived fear. Meanwhile, refugees are fleeing from actual persecution, actual conditions that put their lives at peril and put them in positions where they are willing to make dangerous journeys just to find safety,” argued Rashid.

Also mentioned were the billboards the Canadian government placed in Hungary in 2013, warning against fraudulent refugee claims. Most refugee claimants to Canada in Hungary are Romani refugees. Rashid also drew attention to Canada’s refusal to accept refugee

status for Palestinians, because Israel is considered a democratic state.

Ron Tremblay with the Wolastoq Grand Council welcomed people gathered at the rally to unceded Wolastoq territory and pointed out that the Canadian state is a colonial state that is also making indigenous people refugees on their own land.

Four hundred and fifty churches across Atlantic Canada have announced that they will sponsor 50 Syrian families. Sylvia Hale, a sociology professor at St. Thomas University, is leading efforts to organize donations to sponsor Syrian families in Fredericton. The Canadian Council for Refugees is arguing for the elimination of barriers to private sponsorship of refugees.

The Fredericton rally, endorsed and supported by Fredericton Palestine Solidarity, the Fredericton Chapter of the Council of Canadians and the Fredericton District Labour Council, was organized by a small group of Fredericton residents. Political parties present at the rally included the Green Party and NDP. Mary Lou Babineau, Fredericton Green Party Candidate, Sharon Scott-Levesque, Fredericton NDP Candidate and Terry Wishart, Mactaquac-Tobique Green Party candidate, spoke at the rally and supported the rally’s demands of opening Canada’s borders for more refugees.

The Fredericton rally organizers plan to form a refugee solidarity group that will do both political action to support refugees and immigrants, raise money for sponsorship of refugee families and support the new families to Fredericton with their needs as they arrive.

Judie Acquin-Miksovsky, a Wolastoq artist and activist, read a poem at the Fredericton rally called Motionless by Crystal Smith de Molina, a Tsimshian and Haisla warrior mother. The last verse of the poem speaks to the senseless death of Alan Kurdi, his brother and mother, and the need for everyone to speak up for refugees:

“He didn’t have to die
his mother
his brother
didn’t have to die
they barely experienced life
and death took them
took them because we didn’t
their blood is on our hands
their frail body lifeless
because we live silently
they didn’t have to die
We don’t have to be silent.”

Honouring NB’s labour heroes

By DAVID FRANK

For their long years of service to organized labour in this province, two names were added to the Honour Roll of the New Brunswick Federation of Labour at their biennial convention this year.

Valentine Ward grew up in Bathurst, where she started work in her teens as a secretary for \$105 a month. When the union boom was on in the mining districts of northern New Brunswick in the 1960s, she went to work for the United Steelworkers and joined the Office and Professional Employees’ Union, Local 343. The number of women in the local labour movement was small when she was elected Recording Secretary of the Bathurst and District Labour Council. It was still illegal to serve women a drink at the Labour Temple, recalled NB Federation of Labour’s secretary-treasurer John Gagnon.

As a delegate to the NB Federation of Labour, Ward helped to promote the participation of women in the union movement and served for several years as president of the Women’s Committee. After her retirement, she continued to be active among union retirees. “Thank goodness,” she told delegates, “I had a union job.”

Also added to the Honour Roll was the late James William Orr (1936-2009), a union veteran from Saint John who was a member of the Brotherhood of Railway and Steamship Clerks, Freight Handlers, Express and Station Employees and then of the International Longshoremen’s Association.

Orr was a stalwart member of the Saint John and District Labour Council and a rank-and-file organizer for the campaign against wage controls in 1975-76 and the “No Candu” boycott of nuclear shipments to Argentina in 1979. Later he was the labour representative on the port commission.

For “Jimmy” Orr, unionism was like a religion, recalled Pat Riley of the ILA. He remembered that when teachers asked Orr’s daughter her religion, she often answered “trade unionism.” In accepting the honour on his brother’s behalf, Robert Orr recalled him as “a fighter who loved every minute of it” and whose name was respected on waterfronts around the world.

David Frank is a labour historian at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton.

This story was originally published by Our Times.



Val Ward (right) of Bathurst was a pioneer in the participation of women in organized labour in New Brunswick. Her name was added this year to the Honour Roll of the New Brunswick Federation of Labour. Also honoured was longshoreman Jimmy Orr (1936-2009), a longtime rank-and-file activist in the Saint John labour movement. His brother Robert accepted the award on his behalf.
Photo by Melissa Bellefeuille.

Friends of Charles LeBlanc : In Brief

By ASAF RASHID



Charles Leblanc, a blogger in Fredericton, is facing charges without legal aid.

Photo courtesy of charlesleblancdefencefund.com.

A group called Friends of Justice has started a defence fund to help well known Fredericton blogger Charles LeBlanc afford a lawyer to fight a summary assault charge. LeBlanc receives social assistance and cannot afford a lawyer on his own.

The defence fund site, administered by Friends of Justice, states that the goal of their efforts will be to raise \$5,000. They expect the trial to go well beyond the first court date, August 26, and estimate that legal costs will mount. Friends of Justice says that the fund is independent of LeBlanc and that the money will go towards LeBlanc’s legal costs, not to him directly, with any remainder going towards poverty related charities.

LeBlanc applied for Legal Aid for for his first court appearance in April, but was refused. He appealed in May and was refused a second time.

Leblanc’s supporters have raised concerns over the denial of legal aid to LeBlanc.

“If you’re charged on a summary offence, the likelihood you’ll qualify for legal aid is highly remote,” says Andre Faust, spokesperson of Friends of Justice.

Faust stresses that this is a problem, “The judge has latitude on a summary offence to sentence you for up to 6 months in jail or fine you up to \$5000.”

Faust says that in LeBlanc’s case, a judge could lean towards a harsher sentence. “Given that he’s embarrassed people in the structure, there may be what I call judicial bias against him.”

Faust is referring to LeBlanc’s blog, which pulls no punches in its criticism of local police, politicians and government bureaucrats.

“There’s a good chance he could face jail time if he represents himself,” Faust warns.

The concern is well founded. In 2010, Melina Buckley wrote a report for the Canadian Bar Association titled, “Moving Forward on Legal Aid.”

“The coverage criteria currently in place generally deny legal representation to low-income accused who have been charged with minor offences even though the impact of a criminal record would be extremely serious for them ... unrepresented accused are often vulnerable and

disadvantaged due to their personal characteristics, low levels of education and literacy, and higher rates of drug and alcohol addiction. Regardless of the seriousness of the charges against them, these individuals cannot adequately advocate for themselves. Many of them end up in prison as a result,” Buckley explains in the report.

The unrepresented fare worse than those with lawyers in both criminal and civil cases, the point being that the unrepresented generally cannot match lawyers in a courtroom. A report by Dr. Jula Hughes and E.L. MacKinnon in 2007, “If there were Legal Aid in New Brunswick ... a Review of Legal Services in New Brunswick” emphasizes the disparity.

“The judges we consulted were unanimous in their conclusion that an unrepresented litigant is much less likely to achieve a favourable outcome than a represented litigant, particularly when self representation was not a choice,” the authors state.

Hughes stresses that the lack of legal aid coverage for someone facing a summary charge results in many problems. She says, “(Unrepresented) are not able to effectively participate in a criminal trial, so the consequences are more wrongful convictions, inappropriate pleas, delays, adjournments, longer trials, inappropriate sentences.”

At his August 26th court appearance, LeBlanc represented himself.

“Charles has got to go up against an experienced Crown prosecutor who knows the court procedures and worked with judges on many occasions. Charles walks in without having that sophistication. The other handicap that Charles has with self representation is his ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). He can’t focus,” says Faust.

In a statement on his blog, LeBlanc emphatically states, “I told the court many, many times, I’m not a lawyer. I need a lawyer.”

Faust adds, “We believe the allegations are groundless and that Charles has several defences available to him: however, because of his ADHD, lack of legal knowledge and experience he cannot articulate those defences to the court’s satisfaction.”

The defence fund site points out the LeBlanc is at risk of losing everything. “Charles receives an income assistance cheque of \$567 per month. He lives in subsidized housing and if he goes to jail, he may end up homeless.”

Supporters of LeBlanc want to make clear that although they are currently putting their energy towards helping LeBlanc afford a lawyer, this issue is not just about LeBlanc.

“At the end of the day, we’re hoping that we can level the playing field,” says Faust. He notes that LeBlanc’s case touches on a number of important social issues. “This is a case that challenges legal aid, poverty and mental health.”

Asaf Rashid is a law student at the University of New Brunswick.



Transgender rights activists at a Fredericton Pride event in August. Photo from TransAction NB Facebook.

An art auction in St. Charles, Kent County on Saturday, August 29 raised about \$5,700 for a legal action by **Elsipogtog’s Kopit Lodge** to enable indigenous people to make environmental protection the first priority for resource development on their traditional territories.

Citizens held a silent rally in downtown Fredericton on Sept. 8, outside the Liberal Party campaign barbeque attended by Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau to make a visible call for action on **climate change**. Fredericton chapter of the Council of Canadians members held signs shaped like the North Atlantic Right Whale that read “No Energy East.” Energy East is the proposed oil pipeline that would traversed many waterways from the Alberta tar sands to Saint John.

Community Calendar

For details and updated event listings, visit nbmediacoop.org. To list your event, email: community@nbmediacoop.org.

World March of Women in Fredericton. Sat., Oct. 17. Featuring a march and inspiring speakers. March from the Old Burial Grounds in Fredericton at 11 am to the Legislature for a rally. A lunch/teach in will be held at Wilmot United Church, 473 King St. at 1:00pm. “We are not free, until we are all free!” All welcome. 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@nbmediacoop.org.

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 at Conserver House, 180 St. John St. at 7:00pm. Check out the films and venues at: cinemapolitica.org.

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