“Death took them because we didn’t:”

Fredericton rallies to open the borders for refugees

By TRACY GLYN

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 participate in a cross-country rallies that called for 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.

“Aside from 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 concerned that Canada may change Canada’s refugee policies. Germans forced their government to change their refugee policies last week. Over 100,000 Germans said they would open their homes to refugees.

“There’s 80% 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 result in the resettlement in Canada 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 for refugees.

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

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 check and qualify as a refugee in Canada... This is an entirely unreasonable presumption based on a contrived fear,” 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 uncended 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, Macataquac-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 political action to support refugees and immigrants, raise money for sponsorship of refugee families and support the new families to Fredericton with their needs.

Jodie Acquin-Mikosvky, a Wolastoq artist and activist, read a poem at the Fredericton rally called Motionless because we live silently their frail body lifeless and death took them didn’t have to die their mother and brother and mother, and the need for everyone to speak up for refugees:

“He didn’t have to die his mother 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.

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.

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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 said delegates, “I had a union job.”

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.
Friends of Charles LeBlanc denounce rejection of legal aid

By ASAF RASHID

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.

Faust is referring to LeBlanc's blog, which pulls no punches in its criticism of local police, politicians and people in the structure, there may be what I call judicial 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; in some cases it is not even possible to articulate their defences to the court’s satisfaction.”

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.”

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.”

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.

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.

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